

MODERN BRITAIN

1870-1939

By the Same Author  
ENGLISH THEOLOGY IN THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY  
MODERN EUROPE, 1871-1939

# MODERN BRITAIN

1870—1939

by  
D. C. SOMERVELL

*With 7 Maps*



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## PREFACE

THIS BOOK is a companion volume to my *Modern Europe, 1871-1939*, published in 1940. There is a considerable overlap in the subject matter of the two books, because British foreign policy and military action in Europe are part both of British and of European history. The overlap is very slight in the nineteenth century and very considerable in the twentieth, for obvious reasons. When in this second book I have had to deal with subjects already dealt with in the first book I have, where suitable, dealt with them in the same words, for when one has described a particular course of events as well as one can, there is no point in setting out to describe them differently when one is writing for exactly the same type of reader.

But of course the main drift and purpose of the two books is entirely different. The other book was an attempt to give a simple account of the tragedy of Europe since the day when Germany became the leading European power. The present book is an attempt to tell the much more cheerful and creditable story of the development of modern Britain since the middle years of Victoria's reign, a development in which the European tragedy has been a very unwelcome intrusion.

In the narrative chapters I have based my account on the routine of parliamentary party politics. Party politics is rightly in abeyance during war, and it is conceivable that it will not reappear in its old form, but it is not on that account to be despised as something trivial and bad. Anyhow, it not only has been the life-blood of our democratic system but it also provides the best continuous thread on which most of the 'beads of incident' can be strung. In particular I have made a brief study of each general election, trying to estimate in simple terms why the voting went as it did, for an understanding of this is necessary to a comprehension of the strong and weak points of our democracy.

In three widely spaced chapters I have attempted simple panoramas of English life in general at the beginning, the middle,

and the end of the period. These chapters are necessarily fragmentary and incomplete, but I hope that they will be found a valuable and interesting part of the book.

D. C. S.

TONBRIDGE,

*March 1941*

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# I

## *Mid-Victorian Britain*

### I POLITICS AND INDUSTRY

*The Franco-German War* In the history of continental Europe the Franco-German war of 1870-71 marks a clear dividing line between two epochs. By means of three carefully calculated hammer-strokes of 'blood and iron', the wars against Denmark in 1864, against Austria and all the minor German states in 1866, and against France in 1870, Bismarck, the Prime Minister of Prussia, had created a German Empire which henceforth dominated Europe. He had also proved the efficiency of scientifically organized conscription and all the greater continental countries soon followed the German example in this respect. Henceforth it was much more difficult for Britain to influence the course of continental affairs unless she was prepared, as she was not, to meet the vast continental armies on their own ground. Germany had thrown 475,000 men against France in 1870. At that date our immediately available expeditionary force can be estimated at about 10,000 men. Not until we joined forces with France and Russia in the early years of the twentieth century were we prepared for large scale warfare. During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century we pursued in the main (apart from an exceptional episode which we shall describe in due course) a policy summed up in the phrase 'splendid isolation', we concentrated on our domestic affairs and on the development of our empire.

next few years by Cardwell, Secretary of State for War in Gladstone's government. The ancient and absurd system by which commissions and promotion were purchased, was abolished—in spite of the opposition of the House of Lords—by the Queen's 'royal warrant'. The period of service with the colours was reduced, and a reserve of men who could be called up on mobilization thus established. At the same time, the regiments, hitherto known only by numbers or nicknames, were attached to the various counties, which gave them a local basis for recruiting. The abolition of flogging as an army punishment in peace-time encouraged the enlistment of a better type of man—no longer 'the scum of the earth', as Wellington had candidly described the army of his day. A number of able soldiers rose to the higher commands, such as Wolseley, who afterwards commanded the expedition sent out to relieve Gordon at Khartum. The principle opponent of these and other reforms was the commander-in-chief, the Duke of Cambridge, a genial and absurd old gentleman who owed his position solely to the fact that he was the Queen's cousin. He was not removed from his post until 1895.

But the British peoples in the middle of Victoria's reign did not concern themselves much either with foreign affairs or with their own army. It is the business of this chapter to establish a firm foundation for our period in other spheres. 1869 was, arithmetically, the middle year of Victoria's reign. It has been customary to talk of early, mid, and late Victorian periods but modern historians seem to prefer to divide the reign into two periods, early and late Victorian, with the dividing line round about 1870. We have to see in what respects these years represent the beginning of a new epoch.

*The Royal Family.* To begin with the royal family. The Prince Consort had died in 1861 and ever since the Queen had lived a life of complete retirement from all public occasions. In those days widowhood was given more external emphasis than it receives to-day. Many widows wore 'widow's weeds'—a black dress with certain other peculiarities of costume—for the rest of their lives. But the Queen's prolonged retirement was unpopular. A widely read pamphlet was published entitled *What does she do with it?* and designed to show that she received a large income and gave little in return. The Queen's reply would

have been that she worked very hard behind the scenes at the nation's political problems, but this defence would not have decreased her unpopularity, for many considered that her political energies were largely directed to interfering with the policies of her popularly elected ministers. Britain in 1870 was nearer to having a republican movement than at any time before or since. Joseph Chamberlain, the great Birmingham manufacturer, soon to be a leading figure in politics, was reported to be a republican. Votes of allowances to the Queen's numerous family were often contested in the House of Commons. For different reasons the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VII, aged twenty nine in 1870, was also unpopular. He was regarded as a man of disreputable habits and was hussed on Epsom race-course after being involved in a divorce case.

But this phase of public opinion rapidly passed away. The very serious illness of the Prince in 1871 called forth widespread expressions of loyal sympathy, and when Disraeli became prime minister in 1874 he succeeded, where Gladstone in spite of excellent intentions had failed, in inducing the Queen to resume by degrees her public duties. Henceforth, the popularity of both Queen and Prince steadily grew until it became something unique in British history. The Queen came to be venerated as a living embodiment of the sober virtues of the British people in an age of unprecedented prosperity, and the Prince aroused affectionate interest as a good sportsman, a 'good mixer' and, with his very beautiful wife, Princess Alexandra of Denmark, as a leader of smart society. Their home in London, Marlborough House, became the centre of fashion as no royal residence had been since the days of Charles II.

*Westminster and Whitehall* In parliamentary affairs 1867 witnessed the second of the five measures, spread over a hundred years, by which the House of Commons was converted from a 'rotten borough' assembly into an assembly elected by the whole adult male and female population of the country. The Reform Bill of 1867 gave the vote to the upper ranks of the weekly wage-earning classes in boroughs, i.e. the larger towns, but not in the ~~country constituencies~~ *country constituencies* which included the smaller towns and the agricultural and mining districts. Here the franchise did not extend below the shopkeeper class. Peel and Palmerston, the

great figures of the early Victorian period, were dead. It was the age of the classic rivalry of Disraeli and Gladstone. Both had competed for the credit of carrying the Reform Bill of 1867. Gladstone became prime minister in 1868 with one of the strongest and most active reforming ministries of the century. Disraeli succeeded him in 1874, giving place to Gladstone again in 1880. The narrative of their achievements will be found in the next chapter.

Westminster, the seat of parliament, can accomplish little without the co-operation of Whitehall, the headquarters of the civil service. Most of the measures piloted through parliament by cabinet ministers have been prepared and perhaps suggested by the anonymous but powerful officials of the civil service, and after they have become law and have disappeared from the publicity of the newspapers, it lies with the civil service to see that they are carried out. It is therefore an important foundation fact of our period that on August 31, 1870, within a few days of the battle of Sedan which laid France at the feet of Germany, entry into the civil service was thrown open to the public by competitive examination. The examination for the highest branch of the civil service, undertaken at about the age of twenty three, was designed to attract the best men from the universities. Throughout the seventy years between that date and the present day, the State was continually taking over new duties and expanding its civil service to deal with them. Whole departments undreamed of in 1870, dealing with such matters as health, housing, and insurance, have come into existence, and an efficient and impartial civil service has become fully as important as an enterprising and public spirited House of Commons.

*Education* The year 1870 also saw the passage of the most famous of the many Education Acts, carried through the House of Commons by W. E. Forster, son in law of Dr. Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby (1828-42) who, more than any other one man, had established the traditions on which the so-called 'public schools' have since been run. Democracy will not and cannot work well without an efficient system of popular education, and the Act of 1870 may be regarded as a necessity after the Reform Bill of 1867. As Robert Lowe, a politician

who had opposed the Reform Bill, said 'We must educate our masters'<sup>1</sup>

The development of our public educational system was as gradual as the development of our democratic franchise, and much more complicated. At the time of the battle of Waterloo it is calculated that only a quarter of the children of the country attended any school at all, and only a fifteenth attended a school that could by any standard be classed as efficient. Such schools of the poor as there were owed their establishment to the various churches. In 1833 the government began to make small annual grants to these schools and in 1839 they began to inspect them. With state grants and state inspection the schools steadily improved both in quantity and quality, and by 1870 it was felt that the state must come into the educational field itself and supply schools wherever the religious societies failed to supply them. At this point the rivalry between the Church of England and the nonconformist or free churches (Congregationalist, Methodist, Baptist, etc.), came in and complicated the problem. The free churches, content with the 'simple Bible teaching' which the state schools would supply, wanted a single uniform state school system over the whole country. The Church of England, on the other hand, regarded 'simple Bible teaching' as not enough and wanted to preserve their own schools with their more definite religious education, and for this purpose required continued and increasing financial support of their schools from the state. Forster's bill accepted, roughly speaking, the Church of England view, which meant that in single school districts, where a Church of England school already existed, the children of free church parents had to go to Church of England schools. The controversy seems dreary and unimportant to day, but it made a great stir whenever Education Acts were introduced in the latter part of the nineteenth century and even later. The Act of 1870 supplied the schools but it did not make attendance compulsory. That came in 1880, and in 1891 the small fees charged by many of the schools were abolished, and the whole of the cost borne by the general public. Finally the Education Act of 1902 established

<sup>1</sup> As a teacher I have found again and again that some pupils think that masters in this phrase means schoolmasters. Their education is no doubt also necessary.

the County Secondary Schools, taking the more advanced children, if their parents wish it, from the elementary schools at the age of eleven and keeping them up to sixteen or eighteen. It may be added that the last thirty years of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of most of the provincial universities. In 1870 the only English universities were Oxford, Cambridge, London, and a very small university at Durham. Scotland had had four universities since the fifteenth century.

*The Workshop of the World* Round about 1870 Britain reached the apex of her success as 'the workshop of the world', a position she had been making for herself ever since technical inventions in machinery and steam power had given her the lead at the end of the eighteenth century. Statistics of foreign trade, imports and exports combined, show that in 1870 the trade of the British Isles exceeded that of France, Germany, and Italy combined, and that the trade of the whole British empire exceeded that of these three countries *plus* the United States. Neither of these comparisons held for the figures of 1880 or of any later year. British trade continued to increase but that of other countries increased relatively faster. Other countries, more particularly the United States and Germany, developed great manufacturing industries of their own. More and more we found ourselves in strenuous competition, industrially, with rivals whose population and resources in raw materials exceeded our own. It is perhaps remarkable that we have held our own as well as we have. There was a severe trade depression in the later 'seventies and early 'eighties, but it was followed, as both earlier and later trade depressions have been, by a wonderful recovery.

*Agriculture* But there was one industry, in some ways the most important of all, that did not recover—agriculture. When Peel abolished the protective duties on imported corn in 1846 those who opposed him prophesied that it would be the ruin of British agriculture, but it was not so. British agriculture, based on a system of tenant farmers and wealthy landlords, often men of old and noble family who took great pride and interest in their estates, was probably the most highly skilled in the world. Increasing population and increasing wealth in all classes of society enabled British agriculture to maintain and increase its prosperity for another thirty years in open competition with foreign imports. But it could not stand against the products of

an entirely new kind of agriculture hitherto unknown to Europe, the agriculture of the American prairies, based on an unlimited supply of virgin soil, the new agricultural machines invented in America (such as the horse-drawn reaper and binder), and the cheap transport offered by the new railways and steamships. Practically every country in continental Europe protected its agriculture by tariffs against this American invasion. Britain did not. In 'the workshop of the world' the interests of the urban electorate and their demand for cheap food were too strong. As a result the British acreage under wheat shrunk thirty per cent between 1870 and 1885 and the population employed in agriculture shrank by 92,000 between 1871 and 1881. Agriculture ceased to be, what it had always been in the past since the dawn of history, the largest single industry in the country. As for the economic side, Disraeli once told Queen Victoria that the Duke of Bedford was 'the richest of your Majesty's subjects' with a rent-roll of something like £300,000 a year.<sup>1</sup> After 1880 the Duke's income must have been surpassed by an increasing number of industrial and financial millionaires.

From 1880 onwards processes of refrigeration made possible the import of foreign meat and fruit, a further blow to the British farmer.

*Imperialism* When people are conscious of loss in one direction they turn to find compensation elsewhere. After 1870 great military powers were arising with which in military power we did not try to compete. We began to lose our unrivalled ascendancy in trade and we quite definitely lost the prosperity of our agriculture. It may have been partly for these reasons that in the last quarter of the century we took a much greater interest and pride than before in our overseas empire. In the middle part of the century it would be almost true to say that the general public regarded 'the colonies', as they were always called, with indifference, and many politicians found their problems to be merely a nuisance. It was generally assumed that free trade would spread over the world and that in a world of free trade colonies would have no particular mercantile value for their owners, but would trade with all countries alike. Canada and

<sup>1</sup> Part of this was derived from London property, but the bulk of it is said to have come from agricultural estates.



morning or evening, round the dining-room table. The Bible was continually read by all who could read at all, and there must have been thousands of simple people who read the Bible daily but never read a daily paper. A glance at the statistics of the publishing trade in 1870 is instructive. The most numerous class of book published in that year was the 'religious' class, mostly reprinted sermons. The sermons of Charles Spurgeon of the London Tabernacle were 'best sellers', year after year. The next most numerous class of books was 'for the young', and these were in many cases full of religious and moral instruction. Novels came only fifth on the list, below 'history and biography', but they had risen to the first place by 1886. To-day only very eminent preachers, and very few of them, can publish their sermons without losing money by it.

The dominant religion of the day was the type called evangelical, and it was found both in the Church of England and in the free churches. It laid strong emphasis on man's immortality, the dread alternatives of heaven and hell, and the possibilities of salvation by redemption through Jesus Christ. Those who look back on those times generally imagine that life must have been dismal, and that there was less happiness and enjoyment of life then than there is now; and they are very likely quite mistaken in thinking so.

But whatever we may think about it we must accept as an undoubted historical fact that the England of 1870 was a remarkably religious country. Its people, outside the slum areas of the big towns, gave more time and thought and energy to religion than the peoples of most continental countries, more than English people had done a hundred years earlier and more than they do to-day. Why was this so? It is a large subject, but it would be true to say that the history of religion reveals a succession of long 'ups and downs' which may be likened to waves. If one starts with the middle of the sixteenth century, the Reformation period, there can be little doubt that England as a whole was then very indifferent to religion, much more so than France or Germany. Move on a hundred years, and you find the Puritan movement has affected all classes, not only Puritans but those who in politics opposed the Puritans. It would be impossible, for example, to find two more religious people in

their different ways than Cromwell and Charles I. Move on another hundred years, to the age of Walpole and the early Georges, and religion again seems dead, but immediately afterwards there arose a remarkable religious movement, starting among the common people, and associated with the names of Wesley and Whitefield. This spread outwards and upwards for a hundred years, and the religiousness associated with the Victorian Age is really the climax of that movement begun long before.

Perhaps this religious movement was at its height from about 1830 to 1870, and our period coincides with the beginning of its decline. What were the causes of its decline? One of them was the spread of scientific ideas. There is no real opposition between religious and scientific truth, but Victorian religion was bound up with many ideas which would not stand exposure to the light of science, a belief, for example, in the literal truth of every word of the Bible. From all sides ideas were flooding in that were inconsistent with these simple beliefs. A new generation was growing up which thought itself too clever to believe such things, Victorian religion began to seem old-fashioned and, as people say to-day, 'a back number'. Gradually Sunday became less a day of religion than a day of amusement, no longer a holy day but a holiday.

*Games.* 1870 may be regarded as the beginning of modern history so far as our great national games are concerned. In earlier times people had generally found recreation not in games but in sport, hunting and shooting and fishing and racing. Modern organized games are a product of *urbanization*, or development of big towns and the concentration of the bulk of the population in them. Town life demands air and exercise and does not provide much space for them. The advantage of games is that one can get a lot of exercise in a small space, and those who do not play can sit around and watch.

To start with football. Football of one kind or another must go back to the dawn of history. There was, for example, a sort of cross-country football with the goals in different villages. Every school would play according to its own rules on its own playground. The goals would be a convenient gateway or the space between two trees. Very often a wall along the side of the

ground would lead to the development of special rules and tactics<sup>1</sup> But the improvement of transport, more particularly the coming of railways, encouraged the practice of matches against comparatively distant schools or clubs, and this necessitated a unification of rules Roughly speaking, as every schoolboy knows, the innumerable local diversities of football crystallized into 'Association' (1863) and Rugby Union (1871), and what are called international matches, between England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, under both sets of rules, began in the next few years Any one who examines the issues of an old school magazine for the early 'seventies will find, as likely as not, a triangular controversy between the advocates of Soccer and Rugger and those who want to go on under their own local rules ('There is no game equal to it!') in spite of the growing protests of visiting teams

A word about the other games It is really curious how a date somewhere near 1870 seems to provide a starting point for the modern history of each of them Cricket In 1869 Dr W G Grace came of age and in the course of the next twenty or thirty years he more than any one else put cricket 'on the map', as they say In 1878 an Australian team visited England and, by its victories over the best we could oppose to it, started an antipodean rivalry that has gone on with increasing seriousness ever since, except when interrupted by German intrusions The county championship system was started about ten years later Golf, for centuries the national game of Scotland, started in England at Hoylake, near Liverpool, in 1869 Lawn tennis was an entirely new game, invented by Major Wingfield in 1874 and taken over by the Wimbledon All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club three years later Any earlier references to tennis (as, for example, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*) refer to a game played in a court, like rackets Lawn tennis had the advantage of being a game in which women could join, but their absurd costumes long prevented them from joining in very efficiently

The coming of the bicycle had as much social importance, perhaps, as any game Considering how simple the idea of the bicycle is, it is surprising that its evolution was so late The bone-shakers of the 'sixties, made entirely of iron and wood, with

<sup>1</sup> e.g. the Eton wall game, still preserved and played on certain ceremonial occasions

no rubber for the tyres or leather for the seat, look as if they had been contemporary with the caveman. In the 'seventies the so-called 'penny-farthing' high bicycle was the vogue. Not until near the end of the 'eighties was the modern type, the 'safety' bicycle, introduced, which made cycling possible for women. For all sorts of purposes bicycles enlarged the horizons of ordinary people who could not afford horses and carriages. Indeed it was the bicycle rather than the motor car that drove horse-riding as a means of getting from place to place, off the roads.

*Dress* Round about 1870, too, male dress began to assume its modern form, and by the end of the century the lounge suit had replaced tail coats for all but formal occasions. The Prince of Wales was one of the pioneers of the lounge suit. Modern types of dress for women did not come till much later. The crinoline had gone out by 1870 but it was succeeded by a less elegant device for disguising the human form, namely the bustle, which lasted on till near the end of the century. What the bustle was, and where it was, are natural questions, but we will answer them only by quoting a Latin description of this article, *superbum aliquid*, which can be translated in more ways than one.

*The emancipation of women* Probably the most momentous of all the changes that fall within the fifty years following 1870 was the change in the position of women. In 1869 John Stuart Mill, one of the leading writers of the time on political and social questions, published a book entitled *The Subjection of Women*. At that date women occupied, in the eye of the law, a status not very different from that of children. When a woman married, her property, if she had any, automatically became the property of her husband. She had no rights, against her husband, over her own children. She was excluded from practically every profession where she would be in competition with men, except teaching. Wealthy men who sent their sons to expensive schools and universities banded over their daughters to ill paid and ignorant 'governesses'. It was all a survival of the crude and primitive notion that the only normal function of women was to bear and rear children.

University education for women had begun with Queen's College, London, in 1848. In 1869 a college was founded at

Hitchin and a few years later moved to Girton village, just outside Cambridge. Newnham College was founded at Cambridge in 1871, and the similar colleges at Oxford a few years later, but not till after the first great war were they given full membership within the university. As for schools, Miss Buss started the North London Collegiate School in 1850 and handed over the property to trustees in 1870, thus founding the first public day-school for girls in the opening year of our period. She continued to direct it till 1893. The Cheltenham Ladies' College, the first girls' public school for boarders, was founded in 1854 and Miss Beale ruled it as headmistress from 1858 to 1906. Miss Buss and Miss Beale had long reigns and in their own small spheres they were figures as tremendous and awe-inspiring as Queen Victoria herself. But good secondary education for girls of all classes and neighbourhoods was hardly available till the coming of the county schools after the Education Act of 1902. Probably a majority of the girls' boarding schools were founded after the end of the first great war. In the sphere of elementary education in the schools of the poor, boys and girls had been treated alike from the start, though so long as such education was voluntary more boys were sent to school than girls.

With the coming of education the demand for admission to the learned professions was hard to resist, but it was not overcome without strenuous resistance in many cases, especially in the medical profession. As for full citizenship in the political sense, Mill introduced a woman suffrage (i.e. votes for women) amendment to the Reform Bill of 1867, but it was regarded by most people as a feeble joke. The parliamentary vote and the right to a seat in parliament was not granted to women till 1918, after a fierce struggle which will be described in its place. The vote in local government elections came earlier. In 1882 single (but not married) women were permitted to vote, if qualified on other grounds, in borough council elections. In 1894 all women, if qualified on other grounds, were permitted not only to vote but to present themselves as candidates at all local government elections.

It is a curious fact that Queen Victoria consistently opposed what she called 'this mad and wicked folly of women's rights'.

*Population* 1870, or rather a year very shortly afterwards,

marked a turning-point, hardly noticed at the time, in a matter of fundamental importance. Up to this time the British birth rate had been steady at about 35 per thousand, i.e. every year thirty-five babies were born for every thousand of the population. After 1877 the birth rate began to fall slowly but steadily until to-day it stands at only 15 per thousand. During the same period the death rate has fallen from 21 to 12 per thousand. That is to say, the net annual increase of population has fallen from about 14 per thousand to about 3 per thousand. The cause of the fall of the death rate is obvious—improved health, due to improved feeding, housing, sanitation, and medical treatment. Every baby born has a better ‘expectation of life’, i.e. it will on the average live longer. The cause of the decline of the birth rate is really equally obvious, it was not that fewer married but that married couples preferred to have smaller families. Why they so preferred is a much more difficult question, but there must be a connexion between the decline of the birth rate and the advance in the social and intellectual opportunities of women.

In most countries and in most periods of history, population has probably been fairly stable with a tendency towards a slow increase, i.e. the death rate has been a few points below the birth rate. From about 1760 onwards population began to increase more rapidly, first in Great Britain and afterwards in other countries. The nineteenth century witnessed an increase of European population that is quite certainly unique in the whole of human history. Europe, including Great Britain, not only trebled its population but also supplied an overflow which populated vast empty areas of other continents, especially in the United States of America. These increases were due to no increase of the birth rate but to a decline of the death rate. From 1877 onwards in England the birth rate began to follow the death rate in a curve of decline, and showed signs of overtaking it. The same is true of other European countries, though in each the change has a different and in most countries a later date. It seems likely that we now have ahead of us a period of stable, perhaps even of declining, population.

In 1871 the population of Great Britain, without Ireland, stood at 26½ millions. Seventy years earlier it was ten millions, seventy years later it was nearly forty-six millions. It will be

seen that the figure for 1871 is not quite half-way between the figures for 1801 and 1940, but this means that the rate of increase had very greatly declined. In the seventy years before 1871 the population increased 165 per cent; in the seventy years after 1871 it increased 73 per cent. In 1871 nearly 40 per cent of the population was under fifteen years of age and only 4 per cent of it was over sixty-five. To-day only about 24 per cent is under fifteen and 8 per cent or more (we have not exact figures later than 1931) is over sixty-five. In fact to-day, though our total population has so much increased, the *under fifteen* population is scarcely more than it was in 1871 and three-quarters of a million less than it was in 1891. No wonder the numbers in schools of all types is declining.

## II

### *The 'Seventies*

#### I THE FIRST GLADSTONE GOVERNMENT, 1868-74

*Gladstone* The Liberals under Gladstone's leadership won the general election of 1868, the first election under the new semi-working-class franchise, with a majority of about a hundred seats over the Conservatives led by Disraeli. When Gladstone received the telegram<sup>1</sup> from the Queen inviting him to form a government he was out on his estate at Hawarden in Cheshire, in his shirt sleeves, engaged in his favourite pastime of cutting down trees. Having read the telegram he remarked 'Very significant' to a friend who was standing by, and resumed his assault on the tree.

William Ewart Gladstone was at this date a man of fifty-eight. He was the son of a very wealthy Scottish merchant, resident in Liverpool and, after a brilliant career at Eton and Oxford, he had entered parliament as a Tory in 1832, just after the first Reform Bill. As a member of Peel's government he had supported Peel in repealing the Corn Law (1846) and with him had been ejected from the Tory party, which thenceforth found a new leader in Disraeli. The 'Peelites' (Peel himself having died in 1850) joined the Whigs or Liberals under Palmerston in 1859. Up to 1868 Gladstone had been known chiefly as a Chancellor of the Exchequer. His numerous budgets, from 1853 onwards, had drastically simplified and improved the system of taxation, and he was regarded as beyond question the greatest living British financier. Apart from this he was known also as a devout churchman, and one who judged every political question from a moral standpoint. He had, for example, exposed in 1852 the iniquitous treatment of political prisoners by the Neapolitan government of that date, and in the years that followed had been

<sup>1</sup> The electric telegraph system had been introduced about twenty years before this date.



a staunch supporter of the movement for the union of Italy, not because Britain had anything to gain by it but because he considered it a case of right against wrong. But his reputation at this date was a purely parliamentary reputation. He had not yet achieved the immense and probably unique prestige with the masses of the British public which came to him in old age.

*Ireland* Gladstone had won the election with a programme of Irish reforms, a subject with which he was to be more and more closely identified thenceforth, indeed it was the Irish problem alone that in the end kept him in active politics down to the unparalleled age of eighty-four. We must plunge into this distressing subject at once.

Ireland had been conquered and partly colonized by the British hundreds of years before, but it had never been successfully fitted into the British system of government. It was too near and too like Great Britain to be treated as a colony, it was too separate and too different from Great Britain to be completely unified with her. It had never, in the whole seven hundred years of the Anglo-Irish connexion, had a system of government acceptable to the majority of the inhabitants of Ireland. In 1801 the old Irish parliament, which represented only the British protestant colonists, the Scots of Ulster and English landowners scattered over what is now the Free State, had been abolished, and henceforth Ireland sent 100 members to Westminster. Though Irish Catholics were, if qualified financially, allowed to vote at elections, they were not at first allowed to elect Catholics to represent them. This absurdity was abolished in 1829 by the Catholic Emancipation Act. Henceforth there was a small Irish Catholic party in parliament, under the leadership of O'Connell, demanding somewhat vaguely and not at all hopefully the repeal of the Union and the re-establishment of an Irish parliament.

In 1845-6 there occurred the failure of the potato crop, on which most Irish countryfolk lived, and the great Irish Famine. Thousands died of starvation, and thousands more emigrated in a state of extreme misery to the United States. In the quarter century following that date the population of Ireland fell from eight million to five million and thereafter to four million—an event without parallel elsewhere in nineteenth-century Europe. One knows how, when things go wrong, the easiest reaction is

to blame the government. It is difficult to say how far the British government deserves blame for the tragedy of the famine and its consequences. The fact is that it was blamed in Ireland, and hated more fiercely than at any time since Cromwell's day.

In the years just before the election of 1868 a body of gangsters, as we should now call them, had arisen in Ireland called the Fenians. They were partly composed of demobilized Irish-American soldiers who had fought in the American Civil War of 1861-5. They set themselves to call attention to the woes of their country by committing crimes of violence both in Ireland and in England. They succeeded. The British public did not dislike the Irish but only regarded their problems as a terrible bore, and the Fenian outrages made the British public feel that something really drastic must be done about it. Gladstone's promise to respond to this feeling won him the election of 1868.

*The Irish Church Act* Gladstone's first measure was the disestablishment of the Irish Church. The Irish Church was the branch of the Church of England established in Ireland. As only a minute fraction of the people belonged to that Church its bishoprics and priesthood and its income were absurdly in excess of its requirements. The objections to it were both financial and sentimental. It swallowed up a lot of Irish money and was in itself a symbol of the English overlordship. Gladstone's bill disestablished the church, i.e. it separated it from the Church of England and made it an unofficial body like the free churches in England. It also took away nearly half its endowments and devoted them to the relief of poverty and the support of education.

*The Irish Land Bill* In 1870 Gladstone tried to deal with another and more deep-seated Irish grievance by his Irish Land Bill. In past centuries about three-quarters of the land of Ireland had been taken from Irish 'rebels' and allotted to Englishmen, and there had grown up a system of landlordism in Ireland entirely different from that which prevailed in England. The landlords were of alien nationality and religion. Generally they were absentees, living in England. Their estates, being often uncared for, brought in little profit. Land hunger led the Irish peasants to scramble for tenancies, and the land was split into

small holdings, unskilfully farmed, and burdened with excessive and often unpaid rents. In England the landlord always provided and maintained the farm buildings. In Ireland he provided nothing but the bare soil, and the tenants provided everything else. Yet the tenant, except in Ulster where a different system prevailed, had no legal property in the improvements he might make. If he were given notice to quit his tenancy, his improvements became the property of the landlord. If he happened, as was unlikely under such a system, to be a good farmer and improve his farm buildings, he would find that the local estate manager who generally managed things for the absent landlord, would steal his profits by raising his rent. Gladstone's bill was an attempt to improve the position of the tenant without seriously interfering with the rights of the landlord. It did in fact very little. Gladstone had to return to the subject ten years later—and so shall we.

*The Franco-German War* The same year brought the Franco-German war, which surprised the British foreign office much more than it ought to have done. Public opinion at first was neutral, regarding both belligerents as to blame—which they were. Later on, when France was putting up a gallant fight against overwhelming odds, public sympathy sided with France. Gladstone secured from both belligerents an undertaking to respect the neutrality of Belgium in accordance with the Belgian neutrality treaty of 1839. At the end of the war he wanted to organize a protest of all neutral powers against the transference of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, not because he objected to France losing territory but because he objected to any transference of European territory without a plebiscite, or public vote, in favour of the change on the part of the inhabitants of the territory. But it was impossible. All the other Great Powers, Italy, Austria, and Russia, were in different ways and for different reasons under Bismarck's influence.

*The Black Sea question* Indeed before the war was over Russia, acting on Bismarck's suggestion, repudiated the clauses of the treaty made after the Crimean war, which excluded her warships from the Black Sea. Gladstone had never approved of this treaty, thinking that it inflicted an unreasonable limitation on Russian rights, and short of a war with Russia there was no

means of enforcing it. But still less did Gladstone approve of the tearing up of treaties by one of the parties to them without the consent of the other parties. Such behaviour, he pointed out, would destroy public confidence in the good faith of governments and reduce international relations to barbarism. In the result a Conference was held in London at which representatives of the states that had made the Treaty of Paris, 1856, formally abrogated (i.e. repealed) the clauses which Russia had in effect torn up.

*The 'Alabama' Arbitration* Meanwhile we had for years been engaged on an irritating controversy with the United States. During the American Civil War (1861-5) the supporters of the rebel states of the South had, owing to British negligence, succeeded in equipping and putting to sea a raider, the *Alabama*, which had done a lot of damage to the commerce of the ultimately victorious Northern states, and the American government claimed damages. Disraeli, when Prime Minister in 1868, had secured what seemed to be a settlement of the matter, but it was rejected for reasons of party politics by the American Senate. Gladstone got the matter referred to an international board of arbitration, on which three neutral states were represented in addition to the two parties to the dispute. The arbitrators, sitting at Geneva, awarded America three and a quarter million pounds damages, which was one-third of what America demanded. This the British government promptly paid. Gladstone's action in this matter was intensely unpopular and, following on our failure to avert the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine by Germany and the abandonment of the Black Sea clauses of the Russian treaty, it created an impression that Gladstonian Liberalism was weakened in foreign policy. But it is to be noted that the Conservative policy regarding the *Alabama* had been much the same as the Liberal policy. To-day we can approve the *Alabama* policy both as a step towards the recognition of arbitration as a method of settling disputes between nations and also as a step towards better relations with the United States. At the same time it is probably true that Gladstone never really understood the new Europe of Bismarck with its unashamed selfishness in international affairs, and Lord Granville, his foreign secretary both in this and his next government, was an easygoing nobleman of

second rate ability The Conservative Disraeli and his successor Lord Salisbury were better equipped for foreign policy

*Other reforms* Of the rest of the measures of this government, Cardwell's army reforms, Forster's Education Act, and the introduction of competitive examination for the civil service have been described in the first chapter There was also an Act dealing with trade unions which will be described in Chapter V. The Ballot Act of 1872 made voting at elections secret; it would no longer be possible to find out how any one voted at elections 'The ballot' had long been a popular demand, and had figured as one of the six points of the People's Charter of 1836, but its introduction did not really make much difference—except in Ireland, as will appear later Lord Selborne's Judicature Act of 1873 was an important measure It reorganized the system of the law courts which had long been in a state of confusion Those who have read *Bleak House*, probably the best of all Dickens' novels (he had died in 1870), will remember the picture of the interminable delays of the Court of Chancery Henceforth British justice became reasonably speedy, it continued to be, and perhaps still is, open to the charge of being too expensive, except for dealing with the comparatively trivial disputes which are settled in County Courts

*General election of 1874* As Gladstone's government grew old it lost popularity The Irish Church Act had offended the Church of England, the Education Act offended the free churches, an attempt to reduce the number of public houses offended brewers, publicans, and their customers, the army reforms offended 'society', the Trade Union Act fell short of what was demanded by the new working class voters When Disraeli described the government, near the end of its time, as 'plunderers and blunderers' and 'a range of exhausted volcanoes', the public laughed and inclined to agree In the general election of 1874 the Conservatives reversed the position of 1868 and secured a majority of about a hundred over their Liberal antagonists There was also an Irish 'nationalist' party of fifty seven members

It is worth considering at every general election why the result went as it did, for nothing throws more light on the workings of democracy In general one may say that there is always a tendency to vote against the party that has last been in office

This is called the swing of the pendulum, and it gives to party politics the character of an unending cricket match, each side alternately batting and fielding. This is in itself a good thing, provided each side has an adequate team, for the responsibilities of office are exhausting and it is a good thing that the leading statesmen should have periods of comparative rest.

But each election has of course its special features. The main item of Gladstone's programme in 1874 was the abolition of the income tax, which then stood at the modest sum of fourpence in the pound. This made no appeal to the working-class electors, who did not pay the tax, and but little to the richer classes who considered that unwise economies would be made at the expense of the army and navy. Disraeli's programme was 'the maintenance of our institutions, the preservation of our empire, and the improvement of the conditions of the people'. It is doubtful if these vague phrases counted for much. We must look deeper. Gladstone, as we have said, had tried to cut down the number of the public houses—an excellent intention perhaps, but it made every public house in the country a recruiting office for the Conservative party, and public houses counted for a great deal in those days when Britain was much more addicted to strong drink than it is to-day. Another point of importance is that the Conservatives had for the first time organized an efficient 'party machine'. A 'Central Conservative Office' was established at Whitehall. It got into touch with local Conservatives and encouraged them to form local Conservative Associations on a democratic basis, supplied suitable candidates to prepare in advance for the election, and so on. The Liberals had as yet nothing like this, but they imitated it and went one better in the next election, six years later.

## II DISRAELI'S SECOND GOVERNMENT, 1874-80

*Disraeli* When Benjamin Disraeli took office as prime minister for the second time he was close on his seventieth birthday. He was the son of a Jewish scholar and writer, and was baptized a Christian at the age of twelve on the advice of one of his father's friends. If he had not been baptized he could not have entered parliament till 1858, when Jews (by religion) were first admitted

to the House of Commons. He had stood for parliament as a Radical (a group who aimed at being more advanced than the Whigs or Liberals), and after four failures was finally elected as a Tory in 1837. At that date he was known as an author of brilliantly witty novels and as an eccentric dandy associated with artistic folk such as are to-day to be found in Bloomsbury or Chelsea. Such a man was not congenial at first to the House of Commons and his maiden speech was 'shouted down'. Within ten years he had led the Tory party, mainly composed of country gentlemen, in its revolt against Peel and become virtually its leader in the House of Commons. Gladstone had long spells of office, but by far the greater part of Disraeli's career was spent in opposition, and not till 1874 did he enjoy a substantial majority.

It was an amazing career, especially for those days when high office was almost entirely reserved for the aristocracy and the upper ranks of the 'public school' class. Disraeli's speeches were always witty, and many regarded him as little more than a clever critic. To-day his admirers have gone to the opposite extreme and regard him as a profound political philosopher and the source of almost all modern Conservative ideas. Certainly his speeches are much more interesting and readable than those of any other nineteenth-century British statesman. Here we must be content to estimate him by the performance of his second and chief premiership.

*Social reform.* Disraeli realized more fully than any other prime minister of the nineteenth century the need for social reforms which would extend the support of the state to the poorer classes. He coined the slogan '*Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas*',<sup>1</sup>—health is the first consideration. The most interesting of these measures to-day is the Artisans' Dwellings Act, 1875, which marks the beginning of the public attack upon slums. It empowered local authorities to remove existing buildings which were declared insanitary and to replace them by new buildings.

<sup>1</sup> The wit of this phrase is wasted on those unfamiliar both with the Bible and with Latin. It is simply an alteration by one letter of the Latin version of the text from Ecclesiastes: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'. Shortly afterwards the inventor of a new disinfectant gave it the name of Sanitas. Gladstone, after using on a famous occasion the Shakespearian tag 'bag and baggage', was similarly honoured by the makers of the 'Gladstone bag'.

for the use of the working classes Sir Richard Cross, Home Secretary, was the author of this bill. There was also an important Act dealing with trade unions which is described later.

*The Suez Canal* But 'the improvement of the conditions of the people' was only one item in Disraeli's policy, another was 'the preservation of our empire'. The Suez Canal had been built by a French company in 1869, and it was jointly owned by this company and by the Khedive (ruler) of Egypt. Henceforth the shortest route to India lay through a 'bottle neck' in foreign control. As soon as he became prime minister Disraeli sought to buy the shares of the French company, but failed. Two years later the shares of the Khedive were for sale. No time was to be lost. Parliament was not sitting, but the government acted on its own responsibility and purchased the shares over the heads of the French, who were also bargaining for them. Among the many letters of congratulation was one from the Queen's eldest grandson, the future German Kaiser, still living (when these words are written) as an exile in Holland, and at that time a boy of sixteen. A few months later the Prince of Wales was sent on the first visit of a member of the royal family to India, and the title of Empress of India was conferred by parliament on the Queen. The Queen took henceforth a very keen interest in all that concerned the Indian Empire, employed two Indian servants at Windsor Castle, and amused herself by taking lessons in Hindustani.

*The Balkan Question* But meanwhile what was in those days called the Near Eastern Question, the problem of the Balkans, had flared up as it did from time to time. At that time the European part of the Turkish Empire included the whole Balkan peninsula south of the Danube except a small kingdom of Greece in the south and a small kingdom of Serbia round Belgrade, both of which had become independent in the early part of the nineteenth century. All the rest, inhabited by mixed populations of Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and Albanians, was governed, or misgoverned, by the Turkish sultan from Constantinople. In 1875 the Serbs of Bosnia rose in rebellion against Turkey and the Bulgars of what is now Bulgaria followed suit. The Turks got the better of their rebel subjects and in Bulgaria perpetrated atrocious massacres in which 12,000 persons were



murdered. Over the border both Russia and Austria were hoping to draw profit from the affair. Austria wanted to secure for herself the province of Bosnia. Russia wanted Constantinople and hoped for the creation of a large Bulgarian state which would be practically a Russian protectorate.

There were really three conceivable solutions of the problem; a genuine reform of Turkish government, only possible under the supervision of one or more European powers, and perhaps impossible in any case, a partition of 'Turkey in Europe' between Austria and Russia,<sup>1</sup> or the establishment of states corresponding with the nationalities subject to Turkey, i.e. the creation of Bulgaria and perhaps also Albania, and enlargements of Greece and Serbia. It is to the credit of Gladstone that he looked forward to this last, which has proved the true solution. He published in 1877 a pamphlet on *The Bulgarian Horrors* which sold 40,000 copies in four days and contained the famous sentence about the expulsion of the Turk 'bag and baggage, from the province he has desolated and profaned'. Disraeli (who on account of failing health now withdrew to the House of Lords as Lord Beaconsfield) really rejected all three solutions, and stood for 'the integrity of the Turkish Empire'. He believed that any other solution would in effect bring Russia to Constantinople and that as soon as she was there she would menace British sea power in the Mediterranean and the safety of the Suez route to India. He held that in preparing to defend 'the Empire of Turkey' he was in reality defending 'the Empire of England'.<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1877 Russia declared war on Turkey and by the end of the year her troops were within striking distance of the formidable defences of Constantinople. The British fleet was sent to the Sea of Marmora. It looked like war, but Disraeli had calculated shrewdly. If war had broken out Austria would have attacked Russia, and the Russian government was not prepared for this. Russia made peace with Turkey by the treaty of San Stefano, and consented to submit its terms to a European Congress at Berlin. This famous Congress (1878), the last great

<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Turkey in Europe' and 'Turkey in Asia' were commonly used in the nineteenth century to distinguish the two parts of the Turkish Empire.

<sup>2</sup> That was Disraeli's phrase. Strange as it may seem, the term British Empire was not in general use till some years later.

gathering of all the leading statesmen of Europe before the first great war, was attended by Lord Beaconsfield in person, accompanied by his foreign secretary, Lord Salisbury, and they brought back what he called 'Peace with honour'. In plain terms, the 'big Bulgaria', outlined by the treaty of Stefano, was reduced to much smaller dimensions, Austria was given control of Bosnia, though it remained nominally a province of Turkey. The old 'Turkey in Europe', though reduced in size, still stretched from Constantinople to the Adriatic coast of what is now Albania. Britain annexed Cyprus as a reward for her services to Turkey.

*Gladstone v Disraeli* These seem small matters to-day but they greatly stirred the British public at the time, mainly because they were the occasion of the most prolonged and bitter of all the political duels between Gladstone and Disraeli, who genuinely hated each other with a hatred happily rare in British politics. Gladstone regarded Disraeli as an immoral schemer to whom right and wrong meant nothing in the struggle of 'power politics',—bad he not dismissed the news of the Turkish massacres in Bulgaria as 'coffee-house babble', just because it suited his game to support the Turk? Disraeli regarded Gladstone as a pious sentimentalist and humbug who was prepared to sacrifice British interests for 'moral' principles of his own invention, or, in his own more pleasing words, 'a sophistical rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity'. The north of England mostly followed Gladstone and was anti-Turkish. London mostly followed Disraeli and was anti-Russian. A popular song of the time, 'We don't want to fight, but, by Jingo, if we do', added a new word to the slang of politics—a Jingo being a person who was prepared to fight any country which got in his way. It was all very deplorable and rather silly.

The last years of Disraeli's government were filled with new ventures in various remote parts of the world—Egypt, India, and South Africa.

*Egypt* Since the early years of the century Egypt, while nominally a province of the Turkish Empire, had been ruled by a series of Khedives of a family which had originally come from Albania. Ismail, the Khedive at this time, had borrowed a great deal of money, mainly from British and French investors, and had spent it partly on the intelligent development of his country.

and partly on himself, for his tastes were extremely extravagant. He was now bankrupt, and unable to pay interest on his loans. The bondholders in Britain and France appealed to their governments, and these responded by forcing the Egyptian government to accept an Anglo-French 'Dual Control' over Egyptian finances. Ismail was deposed, and another member of his family took his place, but was a mere puppet in the hands of the Dual Control. This was the beginning of a long story not yet completed. It will be continued in the next chapter.

*Afghanistan* The history of our conquest of India is the story of a search for a frontier. We went there originally to trade, and established trading bases on the coast at Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. Neighbouring Indian rulers would not leave these places alone, so we had to conquer them. Then we found we had to conquer the neighbours of our neighbours, until in the course of the hundred years (roughly 1750-1850) between Clive and the conquest of the Panjab we had extended our control over the whole country and reached its mountain frontiers. But was this enough? were these frontiers adequate? must we go farther and conquer Burma, Thibet, Afghanistan? We have, as it turned out, conquered Burma in a series of wars between 1826 and 1886, we have not conquered Thibet; Afghanistan we twice decided to conquer or at any rate to bring under our control, and both efforts proved to be disastrous mistakes. The first occurred in the 1830's, the second in the later 1870's.

The trouble arose out of our hostility to Russia in the Balkans. Russia sent an embassy to the Amir (King) of Afghanistan in 1878. Lord Lytton,<sup>1</sup> the rather aggressive viceroy whom Disraeli had sent out to govern India, had already annexed Baluchistan, to the south of Afghanistan, in 1876, and had adopted the view that Afghanistan must either be 'broken up' or compelled to accept a permanent British Resident, which would reduce it more or less to the status of the larger Indian Native States (e.g. Mysore) within British India. The Resident, Cavagnari, was forcibly established at Kabul, and a few months later he and all his staff were murdered, as Lord Lawrence, the most famous living ex viceroy, had foretold they would be. There followed

<sup>1</sup> Son of the novelist, author of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, etc., who had been a cabinet colleague of Disraeli in earlier days.

a series of Afghan campaigns, chiefly notable to-day for the fact that Sir Frederick Roberts established his reputation by his brilliant marches from the Kurrum pass to Kabul and afterwards from Kabul to Kandahar. Roberts, who served forty-one years in the Indian army, had won the V.C. during the Mutiny. Afterwards he was commander-in-chief in the South African war, and died while visiting the British troops in France in 1914. In his later years he was, beyond all comparison, the *berô*<sup>1</sup> of the British army. There have perhaps been greater British soldiers but none more admired and loved.

*South Africa* What is now the Union of South Africa consisted, when Disraeli became prime minister, of two British colonies, Cape Colony and Natal, two Dutch republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, and a number of native states of which the most formidable was Zululand. The Transvaal, a large area of scattered Dutch farms, was in a deplorable condition. There was virtually no government, though there was a President whose treasury at one time contained the sum of twelve and sixpence. The farmers were continually at war with the natives and often defeated by them. Slave trade and slavery existed in all but name. Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, aimed at establishing, under British control, a federation of the two colonies and the two republics. He sent an agent, Shepstone, a citizen of Natal, to President Burgers at Pretoria.<sup>1</sup> Burgers agreed to annexation, provided that he and his friends were given pensions and that he was allowed to make a public protest against the annexation. So the Union Jack was run up (1877).

Meanwhile Sir Bartle Frere, a distinguished Indian civil servant, had arrived as British High Commissioner to carry through the federation programme. He was greatly impressed by the menace of the powerful and warlike Zulu tribes under Keshwayo (or Cetewayo as he is often mistakenly called) and without authority from the government at home—for there was then no telegraphic communication between London and South Africa—embarked on the conquest of Zululand. Owing to the carelessness and incompetence of the British commander, Lord

<sup>1</sup> With Shepstone was a young journalist, Rider Haggard, subsequently famous for his South African novels, *King Solomon's Mines* and others.

Chelmsford, a British force of over 800 men was entirely destroyed by the Zulus at Isandlwana (1879) but six months later the Zulu power was finally broken at Ulundi.

Meanwhile the annexed Transvaal had not been tactfully handled. The Boers, as the Dutch farmers were called, were clamouring for a return of their independence, the more so as we had obligingly destroyed the most formidable of their native enemies. Federation seemed farther off than ever.

*Midlothian* All these things supplied ammunition to Gladstone's campaign for the destruction of 'Beaconsfieldism'. He had recently accepted nomination as parliamentary candidate for the constituency of Midlothian in Scotland and in November 1879 he undertook a fortnight's oratorical campaign there. The Midlothian campaign was a notable event for more reasons than one. Hitherto politicians had mostly confined their speech making outside parliament to election times and to annual addresses to their own constituents, though Disraeli had, in 1872, made notable speeches at the Crystal Palace and at Manchester. But Gladstone's effort was on a much larger scale. His speeches were in fact addresses through the press to the nation. They mark a recognition of the fact that, with the growth of democracy, a leading statesman can be, and ought to be, something more than the chief of a cabinet and a leader in parliament. He must make direct contact with the people.

In his subject matter Gladstone certainly did not, like some of his successors, play down to his audience. His chief subjects were finance and Christian idealism. He had an almost unique gift for making financial problems interesting to a popular audience. As for Christian idealism he took the line that the Afghans and the Zulus, however backward in civilization, had a right as fellow human beings to live their own lives in their own way, and that it was wicked to subject them to the horrors of war merely to increase the power of the British Empire. The argument may have been fallacious, as applied to either or both of these particular cases, but there was nothing ignoble about it.

*The election of 1880* A general election followed in 1880, and once again the pendulum swung back, giving the Liberals a majority of about a hundred. Why was this? Midlothian may

have counted for a good deal, also the fact that Joseph Chamberlain, who had recently entered parliament as a Liberal, had organized a 'party machine' more efficient than that of the Conservatives. It is also to be remembered that the government's imperial ventures had been chequered by misfortune. The statesmen at Westminster were not to blame for Isandlwana but it doubtless lost them votes. More than this, these years bad, as we have already said elsewhere, been marked by a serious decline both in industry and agriculture, the former proving temporary and the latter permanent. The summer and the harvest of 1879 had been the worst within living memory. Such things, however illogically, incline people to try a change of government.

withdrew from Afghanistan, though Beaconsfield protested against a 'policy of scuttle' in his last speech. He died in 1881.<sup>1</sup>

*South Africa* As for South Africa, Gladstone had more or less promised the Boers the restoration of independence in the Transvaal, but for various reasons his government delayed to give it. The Boers grew impatient and found a new and resolute leader in Paul Kruger, of whom much would be heard in the next twenty years. They proceeded to attack the very small British force in Natal and defeated a detachment of less than 400 men at Majuba Hill (1881) at the very moment when negotiations for the independence of the Transvaal were being opened. Had there been a telegraph to South Africa Majuba would never have occurred. What was to be done now? A demand arose that Majuba should be 'avenged'. The government held that what was right before Majuba was right after it. Transvaal independence was restored, subject to British 'suzerainty', which meant that the Transvaal was not entitled to enter in relations with foreign countries. At that date the goldfield had not been discovered, and the country was regarded as extremely unimportant.

*Egypt* The Egyptian problem proved much more difficult, and what happened was the very reverse of 'extrication'. In 1881 there was an Egyptian rebellion against the Dual Control, led by Arabi Pasba, a colonel of the Egyptian army. Gladstone wanted joint action of all the European powers, but Bismarck much preferred that Britain and France should 'stew in their own juice'. He foresaw that their partnership in Egypt would break up, with ill feeling on both sides, and that was just what he wanted. In January 1882 France was all for strong action, and persuaded the British government to co-operate in a 'Joint Note' to the Khedive, declaring that the Dual Control would be maintained, if necessary by force, and British and French naval squadrons arrived off Alexandria. Three weeks later the French had changed their government and their mind. The French fleet withdrew. The British bombarded Alexandria, and an

<sup>1</sup> Disraeli amused himself during the last year of his life by writing another novel, *Endymion*. The publisher paid for it the largest sum ever paid up to that date for a novel. His first novel, *Vivian Grey*, had been published fifty-five years before (1826, when he was twenty-one).

expeditionary force under Wolseley defeated Arabi's forces at Tel-el Kebir. Henceforth Britain was saddled with the government of Egypt, whether she liked it or not. Egypt was never 'painted red' or annexed to the British Empire, but for the next forty years it was to all intents and purposes a British possession, except that other European countries, especially the French, retained certain rights there which enabled them to make our task much more difficult than it would otherwise have been. In 1883 Sir Evelyn Baring, afterwards Lord Cromer, began his twenty four years' government of Egypt, with the unassuming title of British Agent and Consul General.

*The Sudan* But behind Egypt lay the vast regions of the Upper Nile, called the Egyptian Sudan, inhabited by primitive African negroes. It had been conquered by Khedive Mehemet Ali in the early part of the nineteenth century, and used as a field for slave raiding and extortion of all kinds. While Egypt under Arabi was revolting against the Dual Control, a Moslem 'holy man' calling himself the Mahdi, or Messenger of God, was organizing the Sudanese Dervishes in revolt against Egypt. In 1883 the British government unwisely allowed the Egyptian government to send an army to reconquer the Sudan. It was entirely destroyed by the Dervishes at El Obeid, two hundred miles above Khartum (1883).

What next? It was decided that the Sudan must be abandoned, but there were a number of Egyptian garrisons at Khartum and other places in the Sudan, and the British government sent out General Gordon to investigate the position and to conduct the evacuation. Gordon was a most extraordinary man, a genius and a saint, and a man destined all his life to strange adventures. The nearest modern parallel would be Lawrence of Arabia, but Gordon was decidedly the greater man of the two. Twenty years earlier he had subdued a formidable rebellion in China, acting in the service of the Chinese government. More recently he had served under Khedive Ismail as Governor General of the Sudan. Such was the man who was now sent out to the Sudan with one other British officer, in January 1884. Within a few months, he was surrounded and besieged in Khartum. Should an expedition be sent up the Nile to relieve him? It was sent, but too late. Khartum was sacked and Gordon murdered in January 1885.



device was the boycott, a word which owes its origin to the treatment meted out to Captain Boycott at this time. If a peasant was evicted (turned out) for failing to pay his rent, as hundreds were in these distressful years, his neighbours boycotted his successor by refusing to deal with him in any way whatever. Members of the Land League also committed murders, but Parnell genuinely disapproved of that.

Gladstone's reply to Parnell was on the one hand a Coercion Act, enabling the government to imprison suspected persons without bringing them to trial, and on the other an Irish Land Act (1881), which enacted what were called 'the three Fs'—fair rents to be fixed by Land Courts, fixity of tenure so long as the tenant paid the fair rent, and freedom for the tenant to sell any improvements he had made at the conclusion of his tenancy. It was the longest and most complicated measure ever brought before parliament up to this date, and was contested in every detail. It occupied twice as much parliamentary time as any measure of the previous forty years, and occasioned nearly 15,000 speeches, over 6,000 of which were delivered by Irish members. Gladstone alone understood every detail, and his performance in carrying the bill through all its stages was a masterpiece of parliamentary art.

When the bill was through, Parnell ordered the Land League to boycott the Land Courts. Thereupon the government had Parnell arrested and imprisoned. The result of that was that the wild men of his party in Ireland broke loose, and disorder was worse than ever. A few months later the government decided to release Parnell, on the basis of an informal bargain that Parnell would pacify Ireland and the government introduce further measures. Four days after his release a group of Dublin gangsters called the Invincibles murdered Lord Frederick Cavendish, the Secretary for Ireland in Gladstone's government, and Burke, the Under Secretary, chief civil servant of the Irish Office, as they were walking across Phoenix Park (1882). That was the end of Gladstone's efforts to solve the Irish problem in his second government.

*The 'fourth party'*—After the death of Lord Beaconsfield the leadership of the Conservative party was shared between Lord Salisbury in the Lords and Sir Stafford Northcote in the

Commons Northcote was not a good leader; he was too meek and mild, and he suffered from an unfortunate admiration for Gladstone whom it was his duty to oppose. Under these circumstances a young Conservative member—he was only just over thirty—rose to sudden fame, Lord Randolph Churchill, son of the Duke of Marlborough (and father of Mr. Winston Churchill). For ming with three friends a group called the 'fourth party' (the third party being the Irish Nationalists) he set himself not only to oppose the Liberal government on every possible occasion but to plague his own 'front bench' leaders, whom he called 'the goats', partly but not entirely because they mostly had beards. Churchill, like Chamberlain on the Liberal side, realized that new political methods were required. He had no very distinct ideas about policy but he made great play with the phrase 'Tory Democracy', designed to suggest that the Conservatives understood the needs of the working man better than the Liberals did. He went about the country making speeches. He idolized Disraeli at the expense of his present leaders, and founded a popular Conservative society called the Primrose League, primroses being supposed to have been Disraeli's favourite flower.<sup>1</sup>

*Domestic reforms* This much harassed Gladstone government had not much time for domestic reforms. A Ground Game Act, very popular with farmers, enabled occupiers of land, and not only landlords as heretofore, to shoot hares and rabbits. Chamberlain carried a bill making employers liable, within certain restrictions, for accidents occurring to their employees in the course of their work. The Married Women's Property Act gave a wife the same rights of possessing property as belonged to a widow, a spinster, or a man. In 1885 the government carried what is known as the Third Reform Bill, extending to the county constituencies the same democratic franchise as the bill of 1867 had established in the boroughs, and raising the total electorate from about three to about five millions. At the same time there was a redistribution of seats, designed to make the constituencies more equal in population, and eighty small towns which had hitherto returned members of their own were merged in the

<sup>1</sup> Evidence on this point is inadequate, but in one of his novels the great man compared a fine helping of buttered egg with a bunch of primroses.

county divisions. Thus was established more or less (but not quite) complete male democracy. Historically the bill is interesting in that it abolished the distinctive features of borough and county franchise which went back to the earliest days of parliament when Edward I summoned two *knights* from each shire and two *burgesses* from each borough to meet him at Westminster and hear what their king had to say to them. For the past two hundred years, or nearly as long, 'the King's Speech' opening parliament year by year at the start of each session had been composed by his cabinet.

*Penjdeh* One last little storm before the end of this government showed that Gladstone could, on occasions, stand up for the British Empire in a way which satisfied even his opponents. Russia was advancing south-eastwards through Asia, and it had become necessary to appoint a Russo-British commission to mark out the frontier between Russia and Afghanistan, with which we were now on thoroughly friendly terms. While the commission was at work Russian troops attacked and defeated Afghan troops at Penjdeh. At once an alarm of war arose, and Gladstone proposed measures of active preparation in a speech which pleased all parties. The crisis subsided, but it may have helped to restore Liberal prestige for the next election.

*The 'Caretakers' Government* Once again Ireland was embarrassing British politics. The Coercion Act (or Crimes Act as it is sometimes called) was due to expire in August 1885. Should it be renewed? Members of the government were hopelessly divided on this point, and committed suicide by getting themselves defeated on a clause of the Budget in June. It was not possible to hold an election at once as the lists of voters under the new Reform Bill would not be ready till the end of the year. So Salisbury consented to form what was known as the 'Caretakers' Government, till a general election could be held.

The alternative to Coercion was recognized in both parties to be some form of Irish 'Home Rule', i.e. the establishment of a parliament in Dublin with limited powers. Lord Carnarvon, the Irish Viceroy in Salisbury's government was prepared, it seems, to go some distance in this direction, and had an interview with Parnell. Gladstone refused to define his views. He was already convinced that Home Rule was the only solution, but

he thought its prospects would be much brighter if the measure came from the Conservatives. So Parnell urged Irish voters in England to vote *Conservative*.

*The election of 1885* The general election of 1885 failed to swing the pendulum. The Liberals retained a majority of eighty two, a success which they owed much less to Gladstone than to Chamberlain, who had put before the electors what was called 'the unauthorized programme', i.e. a programme of his own, unsanctioned by the leaders of the party, and containing a number of reforms designed for the benefit of farmers and farm labourers. It was the newly enfranchised voters of the county constituencies who gave the Liberals their majority. But in Ireland Parnell, helped by the new franchise, won 86 out of the 100 seats, including every single constituency in the part of Ireland now covered by the Irish Free State. Parnell was master of the situation, whichever party he sided with, he could defeat the other.

## II THE HOME RULE BILLS AND THE END OF GLADSTONE 1886-95

The Parnellite triumph strengthened Gladstone's conviction that Home Rule was the only solution for Ireland, but he maintained his silence, for he hoped that the Conservatives would take up a Home Rule policy and enact a Home Rule Bill in the new parliament with Liberal support, and he knew that if he announced his views, the Conservatives would tend to swing over to the opposite policy. As he looked back over the century he saw that some of the greatest measures, Catholic Emancipation in 1829, repeal of the Corn Law in 1846, the second Reform Bill in 1867, had been carried by Conservative governments with Liberal support, and were thus national rather than party measures. He felt that it would be disastrous if proposals for Irish self government became a battle-ground of British party politics, and the events of the next thirty years proved his fears to be only too well justified. The Conservatives, on the other hand, realized that if they introduced an Irish Home Rule bill they would split their party from top to bottom. Owing to the cautious attitude of the leaders on both sides at the recent general

election the British public was entirely unprepared for such a step. Parnell, while uniting the Catholic majority of Ireland behind him had taken no pains to conciliate Britain; indeed he had openly treated her as an enemy country. There was also a feeling that a grant of Home Rule to Ireland, however limited in scope, would prove the thin end of the wedge, and would lead to virtual independence, which would prove a source of weakness if ever we were engaged in a great European war.<sup>1</sup>

*Gladstone's third government.* Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule became known, owing to an indiscretion of one of his sons, before parliament met in January 1886. The Conservatives at once secured their own defeat by announcing that they would re-establish 'coercion' in Ireland. Gladstone formed his third government, but Hartington and several of his old Whig<sup>2</sup> colleagues refused to join. Chamberlain joined but almost immediately resigned. These men and their followers, nearly a hundred strong, became known as Liberal Unionists, and in the course of the next ten years drifted across into the Conservative party, carrying their name with them to their new party, which was henceforth often called Unionist as well as Conservative. John Morley, a well-known writer and afterwards Gladstone's biographer, became Irish Secretary and Gladstone's chief support in his new policy. Lord Rosebery, a brilliant young Scotsman, replaced Granville as foreign secretary. The Queen more or less insisted on this, and whatever we may think of royal intervention in such matters she was quite right in her choice.

Gladstone's first Home Rule bill was by modern standards a very cautious measure. It would not have established anything like the Irish Free State, which enjoys as much independence as Canada. It gave Ireland control of her domestic affairs, excluding police and tariffs. Indeed it offered Ireland not much more

<sup>1</sup> This apprehension was well grounded as can be seen to-day (1941). The fact that our navy can no longer use the harbours of western Ireland has been the direct cause of some at least of the destruction of shipping by German U-boats.

<sup>2</sup> Whig and Tory are of course the old names of the Liberal and Conservative parties. The Conservatives are still often called Tories. 'Whig', on the other hand, became the name of the old aristocratic wing of the Liberal party. When most of these deserted Gladstone in 1886 the name passed out of use, because what it represented had disappeared. Henceforth Whigs and Tories were both Conservatives.

than a sort of glorified County Council. There would still be Irish members at Westminster in reduced numbers. It applied to the whole of Ireland, and would thus have brought Ulster, or Northern Ireland, most unwillingly under the control of a Dublin government. It was opposed by the whole Conservative party and the Liberal Unionists, and defeated by 30 votes. Parliament was at once dissolved, though it had only sat six months, and the general election of 1886 gave the Unionists (Conservative and Liberal) a majority of 178 in Great Britain. In Ireland the results were exactly the same as before, 86 Nationalists and 14 Unionists from Northern Ireland.

Why was Gladstone so heavily defeated? Partly because a divided party, as the Liberals were divided, always suffers defeat; partly because the orderly British detested Irish disorder and believed, with Salisbury, that what Ireland needed was 'twenty years of strong government', partly because Gladstone had nothing to offer the British electorate. He was now an old man, and he remained in politics for the sake of Ireland alone. It was Chamberlain's programme that had won the county constituencies in 1885, and Chamberlain was now on the other side.

*Lord Salisbury* Salisbury's second government was in office from 1886 to 1892. Lord Salisbury did not make as vivid an impression on the public mind as Gladstone or Disraeli, but he was a great man in his own way. An aristocrat of the aristocrats he was directly descended from Queen Elizabeth's chief minister Burghley.<sup>1</sup> He was not much interested in domestic affairs, but was one of the greatest of our foreign ministers. During the greater part of his three premierships he combined the offices of prime minister and foreign secretary, and always declared that he much preferred the latter. During the six years now opening his main concern was with tropical Africa, which at this date was being rapidly partitioned between the European powers. As part of a settlement of East African questions with Germany, he surrendered the island of Heligoland, which we had annexed

<sup>1</sup> He had in some respects unaristocratic tastes. Outside politics his chief hobby was electrical experiments, and his magnificent mansion, Hatfield House, was the first private house in England to have electric lighting, the installation being set up by local workmen under Salisbury's own supervision (1880). During dinner parties the lights often went out, and on one occasion set fire to the paneling.

from Denmark as a useful base for smuggled commerce with Napoleon's empire after his Berlin Decree. The surrender of Heligoland was criticized at the time and it proved valuable to the German navy in the German wars in the twentieth century. But it is doubtful if, when at war with Germany, we could have hung on to it. Anyhow, its possession by us was naturally resented by the Germans.

*The fall of Churchill* When a prime minister is in the House of Lords the position of Leader of the House of Commons becomes very important, for he represents the prime minister on the principal field of action. Churchill had triumphed over 'the goats' and secured the position for himself, with the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Every one, and not least himself, expected him to be prime minister in a few years. But pride goes before the fall. He quarrelled with his colleagues over the details of his first budget, refusing to allow the Admiralty as much money as it wanted for the navy, and resigned in a temper. He thought the party could not do without him. But Salisbury found a new Chancellor in Goschen, a Liberal Unionist and a leading authority on finance, and a new Leader of the House in W. H. Smith, who had made his fortune in railway bookstalls, a man of no genius but great popularity.<sup>1</sup> It was the end of Churchill's career, for he lost his health and died some years later.

*Balfour* Into Churchill's place as the man with a future before him there stepped Lord Salisbury's nephew, Arthur Balfour, formerly Churchill's follower in the 'fourth party'. Balfour was a man of really brilliant intellect, but it had hitherto been supposed that he did not take politics or anything else quite seriously enough to achieve eminence, that he was, in fact, more of a philosopher than a politician. However, he accepted the Irish office, the most difficult and thankless of posts, and made a success of it, keeping order with a firm hand and introducing valuable reforms. He showed he was not afraid of the Irish, either in Ireland or at Westminster. They called him 'Bloody Balfour', but they respected him, they even liked him because, like most of them, he had an exquisite sense of humour.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> When First Lord of the Admiralty he had been introduced in Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* as Sir Joseph Porter.

<sup>2</sup> Balfour was also expert at golf and lawn tennis. Caricatures often show him armed with a golf club.

*Local Government* These were on the whole quiet years after the stormy 1880-86 period. One of the principal new departures was an Act of 1888 establishing County Councils, including the London County Council. Hitherto the counties, apart from the larger towns (which had been given elected borough councils in 1835) had been governed by magistrates, nominated by the Lord-Lieutenants of the various counties, who were in turn nominated by the prime minister. In London there had been a chaos of conflicting authorities, and what a mess they made of it can be gathered by any one who reads the numerous descriptions of the horrors of old London in the novels of Dickens. This Local Government Act of 1888 was supplemented by another in 1894, establishing the modern urban and rural district councils, and yet another in 1899 dividing London into its present boroughs. These Acts together created the system we have to-day. Democracy in local government is much less exciting than democracy on the national scale, as is proved by the fact that at a parliamentary general election about three-quarters of the electorate usually record their votes, whereas in local elections the number seldom rises above one-third. In fact local government is like the digestive system, so long as it is working well we do not notice it. So perhaps the fact that most of us do not take much interest in local government, while discreditable to us, is creditable to it.

*The fall of Parnell* The sensational events of these years centred round the stormy personality of Parnell. A brief triumph was followed by a final downfall.

*The Times* newspaper, hitherto famous for its political impartiality, had become a strong Unionist organ and published a series of articles entitled 'Parnellism and Crime', designed to prove that Parnell and his colleagues in parliament were responsible for the crimes committed by anti-British gangsters in Ireland. In the course of these articles was published a photograph of a letter apparently written by Parnell, approving of the Phoenix Park murders. Unionists naturally gloated and British Liberals were correspondingly depressed. Parnell said it was a silly forgery, but treated the matter with contempt, and took no proceedings for damages against *The Times* on the ground that he would never get a fair verdict from a British jury. However, the



government appointed a Special Commission to examine all the charges contained in *The Times* articles, and in the course of these proceedings it was proved that the famous letter was a forgery,<sup>1</sup> though *The Times* had, of course, accepted it in the belief that it was genuine. Public opinion is seldom logical, and the fact that Parnell had been made the victim of a fraud inclined people to think that Home Rule might after all be the right solution of the Irish problem.

A year later another sensation inclined public opinion very much in the opposite direction. Parnell became the co-respondent in a divorce case. It was a sordid story. He had for years been living with Mrs. O'Shea, and the husband accepted the situation on condition that Parnell would help him forward towards a political career. The reason why the divorce had not taken place years before was that Mrs. O'Shea expected a very large legacy from a very old and pious aunt. When the old lady died at the age of ninety-seven, and the £150,000 was safely pocketed, the divorce went ahead. Parnell's party was dependent on the votes of Irish Catholics, Gladstone's party was largely dependent on the votes of British nonconformists, and both these religious communities took strong views on the subject of sexual immorality. To save his party and his cause Parnell should have resigned his leadership, but with amazing egoism he refused to do so. Three-quarters of his party rebelled and chose a new leader, and Parnell died a year later (1891), fighting a losing battle against the Irish Catholic Church.

*The second Home Rule Bill* The election of 1892 swung the pendulum, but it did not swing it far enough for the Home Rulers. It gave the Liberals with the Irish Nationalists a majority of forty, but left them in a minority of forty on the elections in Great Britain alone. Thus it could be said that Great Britain, 'the predominant partner', had repeated its veto on the proposed rearrangement of the relationship between the two islands. Gladstone took office as prime minister for the fourth time (a record, though there have been several with three premierships) and introduced another Home Rule Bill. It passed the House of Commons but was decisively rejected by

<sup>1</sup> A clumsy forgery, since it contained the misspelling 'hesitency'. The forger was an Irishman in need of cash, by name Pigott.

the House of Lords, which rejected several other government bills as well. The cry was now heard for the first time that the House of Lords must be 'either mended or ended'

*Gladstone's retirement* Early in 1894 Gladstone resigned at the age of eighty four. He died four years later. Whatever might be thought of some of his policies there was general agreement that he had been, in the words of one political opponent, Lord Salisbury, 'a great Christian', and in the words of another, Balfour, 'the greatest member of the greatest deliberative assembly in the world'. No other British statesman had ever roused such widespread interest, or had his portrait hung in so many humble homes. None had evoked so much gratitude in foreign countries whose causes he had at various times championed, Italy and Greece for example. Indeed the case against him in his later years more or less amounts to this, that he did not put what is commonly called patriotism first, but championed Zulus and Afghans, Sudanese and Irish, against what were rightly or wrongly regarded as British interests.

*The Navy* His resignation when it came was due not only to old age but also to his refusal to accept the unanimous demand of his colleagues for more money to be spent on the navy, and by a curious coincidence this had also been the cause of the downfall of that very different man, Lord Randolph Churchill. In the old days the wooden battleships of the type that won Trafalgar were good for sixty years, but now improvements in armament and gunnery came so fast that whole navies were rendered obsolete in a few years and had to be replaced. It is said, for example, that H.M.S. *Rodney*, completed in 1888, could, if properly handled, have fought and sunk the whole British navy as it stood in 1881, and that the *Magnificent*, launched with the money refused by Gladstone in 1894, could have done much the same with all the ships of the *Rodney* class. The *Dreadnought* of 1905 made a similar advance ten years later, and set the standard for the battleships of the first great war. It is quite possible that, if we had not built the *Magnificent* and her sister ships in the last years of the century, we should have had to face a coalition of Continental powers during the South African war of 1899-1902.

*The Rosebery government* Gladstone was succeeded by his

foreign secretary, Lord Rosebery, who won the Derby twice during his short premiership, a record which would have increased his popularity if he had been a Conservative premier, but did not help him at all with the Liberals—a fact which may throw some light on the difference between the two parties. The only important achievement of this government was the 1894 budget (annual scheme of taxation) introduced by Sir William Harcourt, who led the party in the House of Commons. It introduced what was to become a very important new tax, the tax on estates of deceased persons, commonly called death duties. The tax was based on the principle afterwards but not yet applied to income tax, namely 'graduation', i.e. the larger the estate the larger the *percentage* of it taken by the tax. Death duties have proved a formidable instrument for impoverishing the old aristocratic landlord class, already hard hit by the declining prosperity of agriculture.

The government was defeated in 1895, and though Rosebery lived another thirty years he never again took an active part in politics. Of the four brilliant men of the younger generation who had made reputations in the period covered by this chapter—Parnell, Churchill, Rosebery, and Balfour—only the last remained.<sup>1</sup>

The general election of 1895 swung the pendulum right back against the Liberals. It gave the Unionists, Conservative and Liberal, a majority of 152 over Liberal Home Rulers and Irish Nationalists combined. Of course the majority in Great Britain alone was much bigger. By this decision the electorate expressed their impatience with a weak government dependent on the Irish vote and a feeling that Liberalism without Gladstone was, as they say, like *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> All four were born between 1845 and 1850. Joseph Chamberlain was about ten years older.

## IV *The Turn of the Century*

### I IMPERIALISM, 1895-1901

- HARTINGTON, now Duke of Devonshire, and Chamberlain accepted office in Salisbury's third government, the Liberal Unionists thus becoming part of the Conservative party

*The Duke of Devonshire* 'The Duke' was hardly a great man but he was a great power in parliamentary life, and one of the finest examples of the aristocrat in politics. He was completely disinterested. Having been born great, he had no need to achieve greatness. The British public admired a man who, though born so rich that he could have spent all his days in the most expensive forms of amusement, none the less devoted himself, year in and year out, to heavy jobs in stuffy buildings, often connected with such repulsive subjects as 'technical education'. He looked, and perhaps was, a very sleepy man, and most of the stories about him turned on this fact. It was said, for example, that he once went to sleep and dreamt that he was making a speech in the House of Lords, and when he woke up he found it was true. But he was 'the plain man's oracle'. His opposition to Home Rule had helped to turn the scales against Gladstone, and, at a later date, his opposition to Tariff Reform helped to turn the scales against Chamberlain.

*Chamberlain* Joseph Chamberlain was the most dynamic force in British politics between the retirement of Gladstone and the rise of Lloyd George. He was also the first example of a 'self-made man' rising to the top of the tree in British politics,<sup>1</sup> for though never prime minister he was, during the next six years, certainly more conspicuous and probably more powerful than Salisbury. Having made a fortune in Birmingham business he

<sup>1</sup> Disraeli might also be called a self-made man but he came from a very cultured home—born in a library as he described himself. Chamberlain on the other hand, was by comparison only half educated in the scholastic sense of the word.

had, in the 'seventies, taken up local government and converted his city from being probably the worst to being certainly the best governed city in Britain and a model to others. Perhaps none of his services in national politics was greater than this. We have seen how he served under Gladstone at the Board of Trade, where he is said to have imposed on his civil servants an alarmingly high standard of industry and efficiency, and how he split with him over Home Rule. In 1895 he had a free choice of practically any office he pleased in Salisbury's cabinet, and he selected the Colonial Office. There was general surprise, for this had hitherto been regarded as a minor post. Chamberlain, however, felt that empire problems were going to be the most important problems of the next few years, and under his treatment they became so.

*South Africa* Before he had been in office a year Chamberlain was confronted with an unpleasant problem—the so-called Jameson Raid. To understand this we must take up the history of South Africa from where we left it after Majuba.

In 1886 there was discovered what proved the richest gold-field in the world, situated in the Transvaal along the ridge of the Witwatersrand, shortened to 'the Rand', thirty miles south of Pretoria. The city of Johannesburg sprang up like a mushroom non-existent in 1880 and to-day the largest city in all Africa. Foreigners, called by the Dutch Uitlanders (pronounced 'Outlanders') flowed in from various parts of Europe and America, but more particularly from Great Britain, to work the industry. Before the end of the century the Uitlander population on the Rand outnumbered the Boer farmer population of all the rest of the Transvaal.

*Kruger* Meanwhile Kruger was firmly established as President of the Republic. In many respects he was an impressive figure, more characteristic of the Puritan Age than of the nineteenth century. He was almost entirely uneducated, except in the Bible, of which he preferred the Old Testament to the New. For the native Africans he had no more sympathy than Josbua had for the Canaanites, and he had an equal contempt for European civilization. South Africa, he held, was intended by Providence neither for the Kaffirs nor for the British, but for the Boers. He was cunning and tough, with a strong sense of the

value of both guns and money. The Uitlanders were unwelcome intruders but they could at least be taxed, and the revenue of the Transvaal rose from £156,000 in 1886 to nearly £4,000,000 in 1898.

If, in return for the revenue drawn from the Uitlanders, Kruger had supplied the Rand with the ordinary conveniences that civilized governments supply to their subjects, or even if he had allowed the Uitlanders to supply these things for themselves, there would have been little complaint. But he did neither of these things. He excluded them from the franchise, which would have enabled them to elect members of the Volksraad, the Transvaal parliament. He would not even allow them to govern their own community. The Rand was without waterworks, sewerage system, or liquor control, its Press was censored, its industry hampered by a government dynamite monopoly which supplied an inferior article at an exorbitant price, and by the diversion of its export from the Cape route to Delagoa Bay in Portuguese East Africa, whither it travelled on the Transvaal government railway. Kruger's answer to complaints was that, if the Uitlanders did not like it, they could return to Europe.

*Rhodes.* While Kruger was holding the fort for the past at Pretoria a still more remarkable man was scheming for the future at Capetown. Cecil Rhodes has already been mentioned. He had made a fortune in Kimberley diamonds, and entered the Cape parliament in the year of Majuba. Perhaps no man ever lived who was so convinced that the best thing for the world was to add as much of it as possible to the British Empire. Germany secured in 1883, through the weakness of Lord Granville, a colony on the west coast of Africa north of the Orange river. But for Rhodes German territory would probably have extended to the Transvaal and shut out our northward expansion. He persuaded the British government (1885) to annex Bechuanaland, the 'corridor to the north', and thus keep open for British enterprise the route to the Zambesi which Livingstone had pioneered forty years before.<sup>1</sup> In 1889 he secured the foundation of a chartered company for trading and mining south of the Zambesi. In 1893 Lobengula, the warlike chief of the Matabele, an offshoot of the Zulus, was conquered and

<sup>1</sup> Livingstone discovered the Victoria Falls. Rhodes, in later years insisted that his railway should cross the river close by them.

Southern Rhodesia established. In 1890 he had become prime minister of Cape Colony, and at the same time he was one of the main promoters of the Rand goldfield.

*The Jameson Raid* It had been an amazing career and its success now lured him into committing an almost incredible error. The Uitlanders were planning some kind of insurrection, or at any rate a public demonstration, against Kruger's misgovernment. It was rather a hopeless enterprise in itself, and they applied to Rhodes for the assistance of some of the Chartered Company's 'police', the force which had conquered the Matabele with the recently invented machine-gun, and Jameson, Rhodes's right-hand man, established himself with a force of 500 at Mafeking, outside the eastern frontier of the Transvaal. The whole affair was ridiculously mismanaged. Jameson invaded the Transvaal and his force was surrounded and compelled to surrender four days later (January 1896). The insurrection in the Rand proved a fiasco.

There was no defence for Rhodes or Jameson. The former resigned his premiership, the latter, sent to England as a prisoner by Kruger, was convicted of an act of war against a 'friendly' state and imprisoned.<sup>1</sup> Many suspected Chamberlain of being a party to the plot, but, though he knew of the intended Uitlander insurrection, he had no foreknowledge of the Raid. It was an unfortunate event in every way because it put the British in the wrong, and gave Kruger an excuse for undertaking military preparations intended to drive the British out of South Africa.

*The Kaiser's telegram* An unexpected sequel to the Raid was that the German Kaiser (who had ascended his throne in 1888) sent Kruger a public telegram congratulating him on his victory over the 'armed hordes' and 'disturbers of the peace' which had broken into his country. Hitherto the British public had regarded Germany as on the whole the most friendly of the European powers. The Kruger telegram was, for most people, the first revelation of German hostility; it may be regarded as a signal of the twentieth century, five years before the end of the nineteenth.

*Imperialism* Queen Victoria's second, or Diamond Jubilee, came in 1897. Never before had a British sovereign completed

<sup>1</sup> Ten years later Jameson, really a fine man though a rash one, was prime minister of Cape Colony.

sixty years on the throne. The Jubilee procession was essentially a pageant of empire with contingents from every quarter of the globe. The naval review which followed was the most formidable exhibition of sea power yet seen in history. Indeed these years marked the climax of a rather boastful pride in an empire 'on which the sun never set'. It shows at its best in Kipling, then at the height of his popularity, with his doctrine of 'the white man's burden', the British were, in his view, God's chosen people, with a duty to bring civilization to the 'lesser breeds without the law'. It shows at its worst in such silly, boastful, patriotic songs as 'The soldiers of the Queen'. One of the best sellers of the Jubilee year was 'Deeds that won the Empire', by an Australian writer, Fitchett. No book written by an Australian ever had so large a sale in Britain.

*The Sudan campaign* The year 1898 brought a really brilliant achievement in the reconquest of the Sudan by an Anglo-Egyptian army under Sir Herbert Kitchener, who made his way methodically up the Nile, building the railway as he went and carrying it across the desert to short circuit the great loop below Khartum. A vast province, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, was added in effect to the British Empire, though technically it was outside the empire and a joint responsibility of Great Britain and Egypt. The losses in men, in spite of two pitched battles, on the Atbara and at Omdurman<sup>1</sup> outside Khartum, were very small, and the total cost of the expedition to Britain was equal to that of about six hours of the present (1941) war.

*Fashoda* Three days after Kitchener occupied Khartum he received news that a small French force had hoisted the French flag at Fashoda, six hundred miles farther up the Nile. They had set out from Dakar in the far west two years before, in spite of a warning from the British government that any French intrusion into the Upper Nile valley would be resented by the guardians of Egypt. Kitchener made straight up the river with superior forces and told Marchand, the French officer in charge, that he must haul down his flag. Ever since France had withdrawn from Egypt, sixteen years before, Franco-British relations

<sup>1</sup> It is worth recording that Mr Winston Churchill then a subaltern of twenty four in a cavalry regiment, took part in the famous charge of the Lancers in this battle.



had been unfriendly, and this was the climax. For months there was a possibility of war between the two countries, but Salisbury was both tactful and firm, and the French gave way.

*The South African War* In South Africa the situation went from bad to worse. Sir Alfred Milner, the very able man whom the government sent out as High Commissioner for South Africa shortly after the Raid,<sup>1</sup> quickly came to the conclusion that war was inevitable, not so much because the Uitlanders' grievances were intolerable as because Kruger was determined on a war of aggression which would drive the British empire out of South Africa. He was rapidly importing armaments from France and Germany. He would have the alliance of the other Dutch Republic, the Orange Free State, and the probable support of the Dutch who constituted more than half the white population of Cape Colony. Indeed, in the war that followed, the government of Cape Colony under Dutch influence, maintained a neutral attitude and its citizens, Dutch or British, fought on either side as volunteers.

Kruger can, in fact, be regarded as the aggressor, but in fairness one must sympathize with his position. If he left things as they were or granted British demands, his republic would inevitably pass from the control of his own people into that of the Uitlanders. The oddity of the position was that there was a Dutch majority in a British colony and a British, or at any rate non-Dutch, majority in a Dutch republic. Kruger had either to 'get on' or 'get out'.

In March 1899 the Uitlanders addressed a petition to the British government, asking it to undertake the redress of their grievances, which have already been described. Chamberlain took up the petition, and demanded that the Uitlanders should be given the Transvaal franchise. Kruger span out the negotiations until the best season for campaigning had come round, and declared war in October.

It has often been said that the South African war was unnecessary and should have been avoided.<sup>2</sup> The argument is that

<sup>1</sup> He was afterwards a member of Lloyd George's war cabinet in the latter part of the first great war.

<sup>2</sup> May I remark that I have myself taken this view in a book written fifteen years ago.

Kruger was old—he was about seventy-five—and his oppressive system would probably have ended with him. Perhaps this was so, though if Kruger was in any case determined to pick a quarrel, the argument does not carry us very far. But there was a wider consideration, involving the whole Empire. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were growing into nationhood, they were no longer mere dependencies, but self-governing communities, capable of establishing their independence if they so wished. For them the question was, what is the value of the British connexion? and the Transvaal quarrel was a test case. If the British government had been unwilling to undertake the burden of a colonial war in 1899, it is conceivable that the Dominions would have been less ready to take their share in a European war in 1914.

*British reverses.* Since we entered on the South African war (1899–1902) without any plans prepared in advance, and since our troops on the spot were in numbers less than half of what the Boer republics could immediately mobilize, it is not surprising that the campaign opened with Boer successes. They invaded British territory in three directions and besieged Ladysmith<sup>1</sup> (Natal), Kimberley, and Mafeking. What is more surprising is that they did not exploit their success. Instead of settling down to these sieges they might have overrun all Cape Colony.

The main British expeditionary force was landed in Natal under Sir Redvers Buller, a popular but, as it turned out, a very stupid soldier. Smaller forces were detailed to attack the enemy from the south and to relieve Kimberley. But the Boers were a formidable enemy, expert marksmen, extremely mobile, and masters of the art of taking cover. The British seem to have had no conception of their quality as fighters, and the once famous 'Black Week' of December 1899 came as a severe shock. Buller, advancing to the relief of Ladysmith, was defeated at Colenso, Methuen, advancing to the relief of Kimberley, was defeated at Magersfontein, and Gatacre was defeated at Stormberg.

<sup>1</sup> Colonial place names are often interesting. Ladysmith commemorates the wife of Sir Harry Smith, a popular governor early in the century. 'Harrysmith' is a few miles away, but unknown to fame as it did not stand a siege. Colenso, which will be mentioned later, commemorates a Bishop of Natal who had previously been a Harrow master, and author of a well known school arithmetic.



in Cape Colony. People began to doubt if our brave and sporting officers really knew their trade, and the well-known remark attributed to the Duke of Wellington was parodied by some one who said that 'the battle of Colenso was lost on the playing fields of Eton'.

*The turn of the tide* From this point onwards the British government and public woke up. Lord Roberts was sent out as commander-in-chief, with Kitchener as his chief of staff, and large reinforcements. In February 1900 Kimberley was relieved by a cavalry force under Sir John French, and a few days later Cronje, the victor of Magersfontein, was defeated by Kitchener and compelled to surrender with 5,000 men at Paardeberg. Buller on the same day relieved Ladysmith, where the garrison and inhabitants had endured severe privations. In May the small and isolated post of Mafeking, skilfully defended by Baden-Powell, afterwards the founder of the Boy Scouts, was relieved by Colonel Plumer, afterwards one of the best of our generals on the western front in the first great war. In June Roberts occupied Pretoria and Kruger fled to Europe, where he was welcomed on landing with great enthusiasm by the French population of Marseilles, but failed to get any support from the French or German governments.

*The khaki election* It looked as though the war was over, and the government decided to dissolve parliament a year before its normal life was ended, and appeal to the country.<sup>1</sup> The Liberal party was hopelessly divided, some having supported the war and others having opposed it, and the 'khaki election', as it was called, gave the Conservatives a renewed majority of 130 over Liberals and Irish Nationalists combined. This was one of the few occasions between the first Reform Bill and the first great war (1832-1914) when an election gave a government a second innings, 'following on' as it were.

*The death of the Queen* In the first month of the new year and the new century (January 1901) Queen Victoria died at the

<sup>1</sup> Though by law a parliament could last seven years (Septennial Act, 1716), the customary limit was six years. In special circumstances, e.g. the defeat of the government, a parliament can be dissolved any time. The previous pages of this book illustrate both the six years' limit and occasions of earlier dissolutions of parliament, e.g. 1836 and 1895.

age of eighty one. It is difficult to measure her influence on the fortunes of the country and empire she ruled. Broadly speaking it may be said that she gave a new lease of life to the principle of popular monarchy. When she came to the throne the monarchy had been thoroughly discredited by the various and conspicuous defects of the four Georges. It seemed a useless incumbrance, a fifth wheel to a coach already adequately moving on the four wheels of the cabinet and parliamentary system. When she died it was the beloved and honoured symbol of national unity, standing above controversy, above party strife, and above the geographical divisions of a world wide empire.

## II REACTION, 1901-6

*The new king* Edward VII was close on his sixtieth birthday when he came to the throne. Something has already been said of him on a previous page (see p. 3). He had been rather jealously excluded from political responsibility by his mother right down to the end of her life. He had neither her extraordinary industry nor, perhaps, her shrewd judgment, but he had a broader outlook on life, and a remarkable gift for making himself agreeable to all sorts of people, though his preference was for sportsmen and pretty women. He scarcely ever read anything except newspapers and novels, and his influence on the course of events in his reign was less than most people supposed at the time. He particularly enjoyed state visits to foreign capitals, and the greatest service he rendered his country was his very tactful and popular visit to Paris in 1903, which paved the way for our *Entente* treaty with France. On the other hand the personal antipathy between him and his nephew, the German Kaiser, increased the difficulty of keeping on good terms with Germany.

*The South African War* The South African war failed to end with the occupation of the enemy capital in the summer of 1900. Instead it continued in the form of guerrilla warfare, or hide and seek over the wide uplands of central South Africa, for nearly two years more. It was a wearisome task for Kitchener and the British army. Kitchener divided the country into sections by lines of block houses and rounded up the enemy bit by bit,

driving them against the block house lines. It was necessary to deprive the enemy forces of the help they inevitably drew from their kinsfolk on the farms, so farm buildings were systematically burnt and their inhabitants, mostly women and children, herded into concentration camps. The painfully high death rates in some of these camps led the new Liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, to denounce what he called 'methods of barbarism', a phrase which excited indignation in Britain though it won him a sympathy which afterwards proved valuable among the Boers.

At last all was over. If aeroplanes had existed at that time the latter phase of the war would perhaps have been over in two months instead of two years. By the treaty of Vereeniging the Boers laid down their arms and acknowledged the annexation of their republics. Self government was to be granted as soon as possible. Dutch as well as English was to be taught in the schools and used in the law courts. The British government made the Transvaal a gift of £3 000,000 to assist in re-establishing the Boers on their farms, a generous action which reconciled many to their new status within the British Empire. The South African war seems so small to-day in comparison with the wars that have followed that most people fail to realize that in one respect it surpassed all previous records. Never before in history had armies totalling over 400 000 men (or anything approaching that number) been transported over 7,000 miles of ocean to fight a war on the other side of the world.

*New reputations.* The war made at least five important new reputations. Sir John French, who was to command the British forces in France in 1914-15, Baden Powell of Mafeking and the Boy Scouts, and in British politics, Lloyd George. Lloyd George had, regardless of consequences to himself, condemned the war from first to last as a wicked assault upon a small nation with a perfect right to its own independence. Gladstone would almost certainly have done the same, but for the time Lloyd George was the most unpopular man in the British Isles. After a plucky speech in Birmingham he escaped from the attentions of an infuriated mob disguised in the uniform of a policeman. But when real pluck has been shown, even in an unpopular cause, the British public have a wholesome way of forgetting or forgiving.

the cause and remembering the pluck. On the Boer side the important new reputations were Louis Botha (pronounced Boata), commander-in-chief of the Boer forces in the latter part of the war, and his lieutenant Jan Smuts. These two men became loyal servants of the British Empire, and the first and second prime ministers of a United South Africa (Act of Union, 1910). Botha led South Africa into the first and Smuts into the second great war.

*Results of the war* Reviewing the ultimate results of the war one may say that in one respect they were good, without war and conquest it is hard to see how union could have been achieved, and union was necessary to the welfare of South Africa. Yet in another respect they were bad, the war perpetuated the cleavage in spirit between the two races. When one visits South Africa to-day one has an uncomfortable feeling that Rhodes is still the national hero at Capetown, and Kruger at Pretoria, where his colossal statue confronts one on emerging from the railway station. Botha, the great reconciler and a far nobler man than either Rhodes or Kruger, has by comparison no memorial in the hearts of any but the wise and the few.

*The Balfour government* Salisbury resigned in 1902 on account of failing health and was succeeded by Balfour who had for the previous seven years been leader of the House of Commons. The Balfour government ended in a crushing defeat at the next election (1906) so that it is often regarded as a failure, but it had some distinguished achievements to its credit. One of these was the Education Act of 1902, establishing the present system of county secondary schools, a step forward in education as great as Forster's Act thirty-two years before. Unfortunately this Act, by conferring further state-aid on the Church of England elementary schools to enable them to keep pace with the increasing demands of educational efficiency, irritated the Nonconformists who wanted the Church schools to be 'frozen out' of the national system. Thus the Act helped towards a revival of the Liberal party.

*Irish Land Purchase* Another important and excellent measure was George Wyndham's Irish Land Purchase Act. The Gladstone Act of 1881 with its 'three I's' had never been a

success, and the Conservatives had for some time been experimenting with schemes to enable the Irish tenants to buy their land from the landlords with money borrowed from the state. The Act of 1903 carried out this plan on a large scale and brought the old Irish landlord system, already described, to an end. Henceforth the tenant paid annuities on his loan to the state instead of rent to a landlord, but his position was immensely improved.<sup>1</sup> Wyndham then went further and began to experiment with ideas of what was called 'devolution', but was in fact semi Home Rule. But Unionist prejudice was aroused, Balfour bowed to the storm and dropped Wyndham from his cabinet.

*The Committee of Imperial Defence* Balfour also established the Committee of Imperial Defence, a very important body containing certain cabinet ministers and the professional chiefs of the War Office and the Admiralty. It served as a link between the army and the navy, and between both services and the government. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the part it played in planning the efficient conduct of the first (and indeed also the second) great war. It seems extraordinary that such a body should not have existed before, but for the previous fifty years we had not seriously contemplated the possibility of taking part in a European war.

*The end of isolation* Balfour also brought to an end the period of 'splendid isolation' (see p. 1). Since the end of the Crimean war we had not had an 'Ally' in the world, and on the whole had not wanted one. Our intense unpopularity in every Continental country during the South African war made people realize that isolation might have its drawbacks. Moreover Germany had begun to build her fleet (1897), Russia had built her Trans-Siberian railway and might threaten our interests in China, where she had annexed the important harbour of Port Arthur, France had nearly come to blows with us over Fashoda, the United States had shown undisguised hostility to us over a trivial question about the frontier of British Guiana.

Chamberlain favoured alliance with Germany, and approached the Kaiser and his foreign minister Bismarck when they visited

<sup>1</sup> In 1932 De Valera intercepted the land annuities and retained them for his own government which, needless to say, had not advanced the money.



England in 1900 The Germans led Chamberlain on and induced him to make a speech advocating such an alliance, but when they returned to Germany they gave the proposal a public and scornful rejection This may indeed be regarded as a turning-point in history

*The Japanese Alliance* Repulsed by Germany the government turned to Japan, and concluded the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902 by which each country undertook to support the other in war if attacked by more than one European power The treaty enabled Japan two years later to attack Russia, and thus prepared the way for Japanese aggression in the Far East But the treaty was of great value to us at the same time, for it enabled us to withdraw most of our naval forces from the Far East and concentrate them in the North Sea Under this treaty Japan entered the war against Germany in 1914

*The Anglo-French Entente* What followed was even more important, the Anglo-French treaty of 1904 This famous treaty did not establish an alliance, binding either side to fight in any particular circumstances, it established what was correctly called an *entente cordiale*, or friendly understanding It was a settlement of all existing disputes between the two countries in every part of the world Siam, Gambia, Madagascar, Newfoundland, Morocco, Egypt It was realized that, though it was almost impossible to settle any one of these if taken by itself, it was much easier to settle them all taken together The important pair were Morocco and Egypt It was agreed that France would support the position we had acquired in Egypt and that we would support the position France was at that time acquiring in Morocco, for the rule of the native Sultan was breaking down and France was engaged in adding Morocco by gradual and rather subterranean steps to her African Empire

In 1905 the Germans set themselves to test the *Entente* and to prove to France that it was of no value The Kaiser landed, during a yachting cruise, at Tangier and made a speech declaring that Germany must and would maintain the independence of Morocco Immediately afterwards the German government demanded that the future of Morocco should be made the subject of an International Conference This met at Algeiras, near Gibraltar, in 1906 and ended in a substantial victory for the

*Entente* Germany received little support from her Allies—Austria and Italy—whereas France was firmly supported by Great Britain. In trying to break the *Entente* the Germans had strengthened it. The military authorities of the two countries had been allowed by their governments to discuss joint war plans.

The Conference of Algeciras took place after the fall of the Balfour government, but happily that made no difference. Continuity of foreign policy, agreement between party leaders on that all important subject, had been secured ever since Queen Victoria had forced Gladstone to entrust the Foreign Office to Rosebery in 1886. Rosebery had been in general agreement with Salisbury, and now Sir Edward Grey, the new Liberal foreign secretary, was in general agreement with his Conservative predecessor Lansdowne.

So much for the achievements of the Balfour government; we have now to consider the difficulties in which it became involved, and which led to a triumph of Liberalism that would have seemed impossible a few years earlier.

*The tariff reform campaign* As Colonial Secretary Chamberlain was very anxious to draw closer the bonds uniting the mother country with the self governing Dominions, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and what would in a few years become a united and self-governing South Africa. There were three lines along which such closer union could be approached, the creation of some kind of Council of Empire to which the Dominions would send representatives, an imperial army and navy with Dominion contingents, a tariff system in which the Dominions and mother country would give a 'preference' to each other's exports while imposing taxes on goods from foreign countries. This last was often called by the German name *Zollverein* (custom's union), it was by a *Zollverein* that Prussia, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century had laid the foundations of the union between herself and the other German states. After each of the Queen's Jubilees and also after the coronation of Edward VII there had been held a Conference of Dominion prime ministers with the Colonial Secretary as chairman. Chamberlain laid these ideas before the Colonial Conference of 1902. The Dominion premiers rejected the first two proposals but favoured the third. Yet the

third was impossible so long as Britain maintained her free trade system, it was impossible to give a preference to imports from the colonies without imposing a tariff, as it is called, on imports from foreign countries. So in 1903 Chamberlain opened a political campaign in favour of Tariff Reform, or a return to 'Protection'

This placed the government in a difficulty. Most of its supporters in the House of Commons were in favour of the change but several cabinet ministers were not, and Balfour wished to keep an open mind on the subject until it had been much more fully investigated. Chamberlain left the government, and so did four free traders, including the Duke of Devonshire.<sup>1</sup>

As Chamberlain's campaign developed it became less a campaign for imperial preference and more a campaign for the protection of British industries against foreign, particularly German and American, competition. It was pointed out that practically all foreign countries imposed tariffs on British goods, so why should not we do the same in return? On the other hand 'free trade', under which we had flourished for over half a century, had become almost a religious doctrine with many Englishmen. The main battle was fought over 'food taxes', or a return to the system of the Corn Laws. There was no industry that needed protection so much as agriculture, but would the average town-dwelling Briton consent to it? The slogan 'Your food will cost you more' may have been bad statesmanship but it was effective 'politics'. Anyhow, the campaign divided the Conservatives and reunited the Liberals. Balfour's attitude, which may be expressed in the words, 'There is no hurry, and the points at issue are extremely complicated, let us all think it over a bit longer', merely annoyed both parties, for a prime minister is expected to have clear views, even if wrong ones, on every subject presented to him.

*Chinese Labour* Then the government made a big mistake in South Africa. The mineowners were short of labour for restarting the gold mines, and asked permission to import 50,000 Chinese, to which the government weakly consented. The

<sup>1</sup> 'The Duke' resigned several days later than the others. There were reasons for this, but of course the humorists said that the Duke had only just woken up.

experiment was objectionable on two quite distinct grounds. It was offensive on moral grounds, for the Chinese had to work under conditions not far removed from slavery and to live in 'compounds' without any women, for the experiment did not include the importation of the Chinamen's wives. It was also regarded by the working classes throughout the empire as an attempt by rich capitalists to increase their profits by getting rid of 'white' labour. At the next election one of the most effective Liberal posters was a hideous yellow Chinese face, but whether those whom it led to vote against the Conservatives did so because they hated the Chinamen or because they hated the enslavement of Chinamen remains a mystery.

Two more counts against the government remain to be mentioned. Though the Report of the Commission of Enquiry after the South African war revealed grave faults in our army organization, the government failed to carry through any effective army reforms, but this probably lost them few votes, for we had not yet envisaged a future war on the Continent. Secondly, the government gave great offence to the trade unions, as will be shown in the next chapter.

*The election of 1906* In order to make more sure of a victory for free trade the Liberals temporarily dropped Irish Home Rule from their programme. When the election came in January 1906 the Conservatives, hitherto nearly two-thirds of the House of Commons, were reduced to less than one-quarter of it. The Liberals had a majority of 240 over the Conservatives, and there were besides not only 83 Irish Nationalists but also a new party of 51 Labour members, and both these parties would normally vote with the government. Some people said there would never again be a Conservative government, but they were wrong. It was the Liberal party, not the Conservative, that was entering on its last innings.

Before entering on the last years before the first great war, it will be convenient to take a survey, for the whole period 1870-1914, of certain other matters. These will be the subjects of the next three chapters. The main line of the narrative here broken off is resumed in Chapter VIII.

## V

# *The Labour Movement, 1870-1914*

THE REFORM BILLS, as we call them, of 1867 and 1885 had given the vote to the poorer classes of the community, and as these classes make up the majority it followed that henceforth they would decide who should govern the country and what sort of policy should be pursued. But would these newly enfranchised voters be content with the old gentlemanly parties and the alternative policies they offered? or would they create a new party, led by members of their own class, and would it pursue an altogether new kind of policy, socialism for example? The purpose of this chapter is to find answers to these questions, so far as answers were provided in the period before the first great war. It is convenient to start with the trade unions, because these were the most effective working-class organization at the time.

*Trade Unions* A trade union is a combination of wage-earners for defence against their employer. The employer naturally wants to get his work done as cheaply as possible, the purpose of the trade union is to insist on the best wages they can screw out of the employer. The members' subscriptions are used to finance the workers during a strike, and also for various other purposes. Trade unions had been legalized by an Act of 1824, but in 1870 their membership was confined to what was called 'the aristocracy of Labour', groups of highly skilled workers, such as engineers, or shoemakers. There was in those days a wide gap between the skilled and the unskilled worker, small bodies of highly skilled craftsmen on the one hand and the great mass of unskilled labour, unorganized and uneducated, living under conditions that would be regarded as intolerable to-day. Trade unionism covered in the main only the former of these classes up to 1890.

The Trades Union Congress, an annual gathering of representatives of the trade unions, was founded in 1868, and in 1871 it created a 'parliamentary committee' which was henceforth the chief organ of 'Labour' (as we call it) for making its views known to the government. In this same year Gladstone's first government had carried a Trade Union Act which, though granting certain trade union demands, pointedly refused to grant the most important of them. In those days, when trade unionists were a minority of the workers in any industry, the difficulty in any strike was to prevent the employer from filling the places of the strikers with 'blackleg' labour. The trade unionists would, therefore, set pickets round the works and 'peacefully persuade' the would-be blacklegs to keep away. Gladstone's Act made picketing illegal. The result was what one may call the first political Labour movement. Two miners were actually elected to the House of Commons in 1874. Disraeli recognized the grievance and his Trade Union Act of 1876 legalized picketing, and in other respects placed the unions in a stronger position than they had ever occupied before.

*Socialism* But the mid-Victorian age had been one of steadily growing prosperity. The old bitterness and revolutionary feeling of the 'hungry 'forties' and the Chartists had died down. What revived it was the severe set back or 'slump' suffered by industry in the later 'seventies and early 'eighties. This suggested to some people that the Victorian philosophy of progress—democratic parliament, free trade, free education, freedom for industrial enterprise and so on—was inadequate; that something much more drastic was required, namely socialism. Socialism is a term with many meanings, but in all its forms it is the opposite of the mid-Victorian ideal of *laissez faire*. The idea of *laissez-faire* is that the state should leave people as free as possible to manage their own affairs, interfering only when they made themselves an obvious nuisance to other people. Otherwise interference was only justified in the case of children who were unable to look after themselves. Thus the state limited the hours of children's work in factories and (after 1880) compelled their parents to send them to school. Under Socialism, on the other hand, the state would step in and take control of the greater part of the nation's business in order to ensure to every one a fair share

of the good things of this world Put shortly, it would sacrifice liberty for the sake of equality

The people who preached socialism in the 'eighties were, for the most part, not working men Hyndman, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation was an old Etonian, and went to his meetings in a top hat Another was William Morris, poet and artist Some aimed vaguely at some kind of revolution But the most influential group in the long run was the Fabian Society, in which the most conspicuous members were Sidney Webb, a writer of voluminous books on *Industrial Democracy* and suchlike subjects, afterwards a member of the first Labour Government, and Bernard Shaw who afterwards became the most famous dramatist of his day The Fabians stood for 'the inevitability of gradualism' They held that socialism would permeate society bit by bit, without any one noticing it, that the state would find that it had got to play a larger and larger part in controlling and organizing the lives of the people, and in this forecast they were entirely right The best thing to do, in the opinion of the Fabians, was to get their ideas into the heads of the rising generation of both the existing political parties They were by no means certain whether a new and professedly socialist party would ever be required

*Poverty* Socialists of all schools found support in the results of inquiries into the actual conditions of the poorer part of the population, which were undertaken at this time For example, Charles Booth, a wealthy shipowner, undertook at his own expense a survey of the whole population of London, the results of which were published in seventeen successive volumes The facts revealed were appalling Thirty two per cent (one and a quarter millions) of the whole population of London were found to be living below the poverty line, i.e. in conditions which made ordinary good health impossible These were not for the most part unemployed, they were employed and often overworked—and underpaid Some provincial towns would have shown worse percentages than London

*The Dock Strike* Just at the time when facts such as these had begun to sink into people's minds there occurred (1889) a strike of one of the most distressed sections of the community, the London dock workers Two socialist members of the

engineering trade union, Burns and Mann, stepped in to assist Ben Tillet, the docker, in organizing the strike.<sup>1</sup> Sympathy was widespread in all classes and the dockers secured the object of their strike, payment at the rate of sixpence an hour! There followed a big expansion of trade unionism. Great unions like the Miners' Federation and the National Union of Railwaymen were built up, and these, unlike the old unions, were not confined to skilled craftsmen of a particular *trade* but were open to all workers in a particular *industry*.

*The Labour party* As yet there was no Labour party in parliament, for the working men candidates occasionally elected became members of the Liberal party. In 1887 Keir Hardie, a Scottish miner and a socialist, urged the Trades Union Congress to found a new and independent party, but he met with no response. Undiscouraged, he founded an Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) himself and was elected for West Ham in 1892. His first appearance at the House of Commons was made conspicuous by a brass band and a tweed cap,<sup>2</sup> on subsequent occasions he discarded the former but not the latter.

In 1895 the I.L.P. put up twenty nine candidates, but they were all defeated. None the less, the Trades Union Congress was being slowly stirred to action, and in 1899 a joint committee of the T.U.G., the I.L.P., and two socialist societies was established under the title of the Labour Representation Committee. Its purpose was to find and support working-class candidates with socialist opinions, and its secretary was James Ramsay MacDonald, who became the first Labour prime minister twenty-five years later.

*The Taff Vale Case* For some years the committee made little progress but in 1902 it was presented with what it really needed, a first-class grievance. In 1901 a strike of the employees of the Taff Vale Railway occurred and certain undoubtedly illegal acts were committed. The company claimed damages, not from the workmen guilty of these acts but from their trade union, and the judges decided that a trade union could be sued for

<sup>1</sup> Burns and Mann moved afterwards in opposite directions. Burns became a very conservative Cabinet Minister in the Liberal government of 1906, Mann became a violent Communist and spent considerable periods in prison. Both lived to a great age.

<sup>2</sup> A picture of this will be found in the *Illustrated London News*.



damages arising out of wrongful acts committed by its members during a strike. This decision came as a surprise, for it has been generally supposed that, under the terms of Gladstone's Trade Union Act of 1871, trade unions could not be sued for damages. If Balfour's Conservative government had been wise, they would have introduced a bill restoring the legal position to what it had been generally supposed to be. They did not. The result was a great Labour agitation, alongside the Liberal agitation against Tariff Reform, and the election of 51 Labour members in 1906.

*Labour in parliament* These Labour members had their election expenses and annual salaries paid from a fund raised by the trade unions. In 1909 another legal decision declared that this was illegal, it was perhaps also unfair that trade union subscriptions, paid by trade unionists who might well be Liberals or Conservatives, should be used to finance M.P.s with whose policy they disagreed. Ultimately the trade unions got round this difficulty by having a separate political fund to which only those members who wished need contribute. The position of Labour members was also eased when parliament in 1911 established salaries (£400, afterwards £600) for all members of the House of Commons.

In their first session (1906) the Labour party secured Liberal support for the passage of a Trade Disputes Act, which not only reversed the Taff Vale verdict but in other respects gave trade unions privileges they had never enjoyed before. But during the remaining eight years before the first great war the party was not very conspicuous. Lloyd George, a minister in the Liberal government, rather 'stole their thunder' by embarking on a programme of social reforms which, for the time being, made him rather than the Labour party, the leading champion of the poor. But it may well be argued that it was the possible rivalry of the Labour party at future elections that stimulated the Liberals to undertake these measures.

*Industrial unrest* The years 1911-12 were marked by a series of strikes on a larger scale than any witnessed before, a railway strike which temporarily paralysed the railways in 1911, a strike of nearly a million coal miners for a month in 1912, which led to the intervention of the government and an Act establishing minimum wages for all classes of underground workers, and a

dock strike in the same year. In 1913 these three great unions made a 'triple alliance' with a view to combined action on some occasion in the near future. The 'general strike' did not come till 1926, but it is likely that, but for the outbreak of the first great war, it would have come about ten years earlier. These strikes were partly due to the new powers enjoyed by trade unions under the Trade Disputes Act, and partly to the fact that wages, which had risen fairly steadily during the last part of the nineteenth century, had stood still during the opening years of the twentieth.

## VI

### *Miscellany, 1870-1914*

THIS CHAPTER may be regarded as a sequel to the first chapter of the book, it gathers together and surveys, from the standpoint of the opening years of the twentieth century, a number of subjects which have not found a place in the political narrative of Chapters II-IV

*Results of Education* The Education Act of 1870 brought into existence in the course of the next thirty years a vast public which had been taught to read and write but, since school ended at fourteen or earlier, was in no other sense educated. The really educated class was not enlarged, that was to be the function of Balfour's Act of 1902. In any case real education cannot be achieved by mere schooling. Many sons of the rich pass through full time courses in expensive schools and universities without ever becoming really educated. However, the spread of elementary education had an interesting effect on the most widely read form of literature, the novel. Hitherto novelists had written for the whole novel reading public. Scott and Dickens were not only recognized as the best novelists, they had also the biggest circulations. In the latter part of the nineteenth century those reckoned by good judges to be the best novelists were no longer the 'best sellers'. We find what in modern slang would be called 'high-brow' and 'low brow' novelists. On the one hand writers like George Eliot and George Meredith wrote for a comparatively small public and in a style which assumed a high degree of intelligence and education in their readers, on the other hand writers like Mrs. Henry Wood, author of *East Lynne*, or Marie Corelli, author of *The Sorrows of Satan*, addressed vast publics in books which good judges despised.

*Newspapers* These facts influenced the development of newspapers. In 1870 and for many years later, newspapers were very serious and by modern standards very stodgy productions. There were no pictures, few headlines, masses of solid print,

and little news was to be found in them on any subject but politics. They had small circulations and were addressed to an educated and serious public. Other classes did not read daily papers at all, though in 1880 a little weekly paper called *Tit-bits* was started for their benefit. Later on an Irishman named Harmsworth, an assistant of the editor of *Tit-bits*, realized the possibilities of a 'Tit-bitized' daily paper. After experimenting with the *Evening News* he started the *Daily Mail* in 1896. The result was prodigious. In three years' time it had a circulation of half a million, twice that of any other daily paper. In due course he became Lord Northcliffe and his brother, who was his business manager, became Lord Rothermere. In 1904 he started the *Daily Mirror*, primarily intended, as its name perhaps implies, for women. A rival firm launched the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Sketch*. What was more serious was that most of the older newspapers found that they must adopt the new methods if they were to keep alive, for Harmsworth is said to have realized that what was most acceptable in the kitchen would find a welcome in the drawing room as well. In 1908 he actually purchased *The Times*, the leading newspaper of the world. He was wise enough not to turn it into another *Daily Mail*, in many respects he did it a lot of good by making it more readable and reducing its price, but it was a misfortune that, during the first great war, the leading newspaper of the country was the mouth-piece of an impulsive millionaire, whose genius ran more to salesmanship than to statesmanship. Shortly after the war *The Times* passed into other and steadier hands.

The general result of the Harmsworth revolution, as it may be called, is that to-day there are far more newspaper readers but far fewer newspapers, and most of them, both London and provincial papers, are the property of a small number of very wealthy firms.

**Religion.** While people read their newspapers more, they read their Bibles less. There was a great decline in church-going. But one type of churchmanship developed an ever increasing vigour. These were the Anglo-Catholics, who traced descent from the 'Oxford Movement' of the early years of Victoria's reign. The Anglo-Catholics made real headway in slum districts of big towns, hitherto almost untouched by religion. The

realization of some of the horrible facts of poverty, which stimulated the socialist movement in the 'eighties, also led to the establishment by schools and universities of 'missions' and boys' clubs which have done much good work. In 1870 Dr Barnardo had opened the first of his 'Homes' for homeless children, in 1878 William Booth founded the Salvation Army. Both these organizations not only did a great work at home in Britain but organized extensive emigration to the British dominions overseas.

*The arts* Three of the fine arts—music, drama, and architecture—were at a deplorably low level in mid-Victorian Britain. Something may be said here about the recovery achieved in all three of them before the first great war.

*Music* British musical talent has always been strongest in choral music, and the oratorios of Handel and Mendelssohn were much sung throughout the Victorian age, but apart from this it would be almost true to say that we had in 1870 no good composers and our concerts were both few in number and low in standard of performance compared with those of Germany or France. A revival came in the 'eighties with the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan, light works but admirable within their own limits. Parry and Stanford were good composers of the same generation as Sullivan, less popular but more profoundly musical, and both did a great work of musical education. Queen's Hall, the first really satisfactory London concert room for orchestral concerts, was opened in 1893 and Henry Wood started his annual seasons of 'Promenade Concerts'. It has been truly said that a comparison of the early 'Prom' programmes with those of the period between the two great wars is the best possible evidence of the rising standard of musical taste. Elgar came to the front as a really great composer with his *Enigma Variations* in 1899. All his best work lies between that date and 1914. Some years before 1914 the gramophone had developed sufficiently to be an aid to musical education, but in 1900 its tone was only sufficient for 'comic' purposes. The early records were made on cylinders and were heard by means of ear phones. 'Broadcasting' did not exist till after the first great war.

*Drama* Why nineteenth-century England with its many great novelists should have failed for so long to produce good

writers for the theatre is a mystery, but so it was. The greatest actor and actress of middle and late Victorian days were Henry Irving and Ellen Terry; they made their reputations in performances of Shakespeare and with melodramas that would to-day be dismissed as third rate. But in the last years of the century a group of really brilliant dramatists were preparing to take the public by storm, chief among them Bernard Shaw, the hard hitting Irish satirist, and James Barrie, the whimsical Scotsman, creator of new fairylands. The cinema was already in action but had hardly become a rival of the theatre; it specialized in 'real life' pictures, such as 'Our Navy', which enjoyed a long run at the London Polytechnic. Charlie Chaplin, the first world famous film star, was not heard of until the middle of the first great war.

*Architecture* The badness of Victorian music and drama no longer troubles us, but bad Victorian architecture is another matter; there is so much of it, owing to the great expansion of wealth and population, and it is so extremely solid. Why was it so bad? One cause was the so-called Gothic revival, a disastrous attempt to build not only churches but railway stations, hospitals, and private houses in a vaguely 'medieval' style, the most conspicuous mark of the beast being the arched window. Victorian Gothic bears about the same relation to real Gothic as the wax ladies in dressmakers' windows bear to our sisters and mothers. The other cause of badness was the coming of machinery which made every kind of mechanical ornamentation cheap. People designed a plain building—plain for usefulness—and then stuck ornaments on it—for beauty. This is not the way to build. We have made some progress since those days how much, is a matter of opinion.

*The National Trust* There are places when no architecture at all is better than the best architecture. The spread of population over the country, the increasing demand for holiday resorts, and the expansion of industry threatened to ruin much of the English countryside. In 1895 the enterprise of certain disciples of the great writer, John Ruskin, founded the National Trust for the preservation of places of natural beauty or historic interest. The National Trust has done a great work in purchasing and preserving for public enjoyment such places all over the

country. It is no fault of the Trust that it has unintentionally encouraged in vulgar minds the notion that the beauty of England is concentrated in certain ear marked 'beauty spots'—horrible phrase.

*Transport* The early Victorian age had been the railway age. The later period brought new forms of transport to the roads. The earliest was the electric tram, run on rails and deriving power from overhead cables. These invaded the big provincial towns in the 'eighties and 'nineties, but were kept out of central London—very wisely as it turned out, for the motor bus which came later was a better means of transport, and all the expensively laid tram-lines have been or are being abolished. The petrol-driven internal combustion engine was patented by a German, Daimler, in 1885 and the motor car was developed in that country and in France, the only contributory British invention being Dunlop's pneumatic (i.e. air filled) rubber tyre. Motoring was made possible in Britain by the repeal (1896) of a law which forbade mechanically propelled vehicles to proceed along the roads at more than four miles an hour.<sup>1</sup> But motoring before the war was in the main an amusement of the rich. The roads, untarred, were quite unprepared for such traffic, and the cars of the early twentieth century raised clouds of dust for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists, and horse-drawn traffic. It is not altogether fanciful to suggest that the dust clouds raised by the rich motorist contributed to the Labour movement and the 'anti rich' campaigns of Lloyd George, and that the tarring of the roads, as well as the extension of the use of the petrol engine to all classes in the motor bus, has helped to restore good feeling between the classes.

*Flying* The petrol engine made flying inevitable. The old-fashioned balloon, a spherical gas bag with car attached below, was launched by Montgolfier before the end of the eighteenth century. It had little practical importance as it could only go where the wind took it. The next development, more than a hundred years later, was the dirigible balloon, or airship—

<sup>1</sup> There was nothing absurd in this law at the time when it was enacted, for the only vehicles controlled by it were heavy steam-driven 'traction engines' with vast iron wheels. Had they been allowed to run amok they would have ruined the roads and frightened the horses.

a cigar-shaped gas-bag driven by a petrol engine. In 1901 Santos Dumont flew round the Eiffel Tower at Paris in one of these machines, and the Germans used them (Zeppelins) for bombing Britain in the first part of the first great war. But the future was with the heavier-than-air machine—the plane. In 1908 Farman, a French citizen of British parentage, performed a circular flight in a biplane and it was at once eclipsed by an American, Wilbur Wright, who flew thirty miles in forty minutes. In the next year Blériot flew across the Channel and in 1911 the War Office gave their first order for aircraft—five planes! It was thought that they might prove useful for scouting.

*Wireless and submarines* The year 1901 is the significant date for two other inventions that helped to revolutionize the art of war. Marconi sent the first wireless messages across the Atlantic, and the British Admiralty undertook the construction of their first submarine. It was another twenty years before wireless telegraphy (dots and dashes) reached the stage of wireless telephony and made broadcasting possible.

*Women suffrage* The first chapter of this book gave some account of the earlier stages of the movement for securing the equality of the sexes. It remains to record the determined attempt to secure the parliamentary franchise during the ten years before the first great war. The opening event was the foundation by Mrs. Pankhurst of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1904. Mrs. Pankhurst was the Parnell of woman suffrage. In her view there had been enough of argument and persuasion. For years past a majority of the House of Commons had been professedly in favour of some sort of measure for giving the vote to some classes of women, but none of the bills introduced ever passed because no government would give them official support, and the reason was that every government, Liberal or Conservative, contained important members firmly opposed to the measure, and no government willingly takes up measures that will split its party. So Mrs. Pankhurst determined to bully the government into granting women the vote by creating and maintaining an intolerable nuisance until such a measure was passed. Her followers, who carried out her orders, became known as suffragettes to distinguish them from the peaceful suffragists of earlier times.



They began with 'scenes' from the women's gallery in the House of Commons, and riotous proceedings at political meetings, and went on to acts of violence such as breaking shop windows or slapping policemen's faces. In 1910 there was a large and disorderly demonstration outside the Houses of Parliament during which 153 women were arrested. Their attacks on public property led to the closing of the British Museum and other national institutions. They set fire to empty buildings. One woman committed suicide by throwing herself in front of the horses during the Derby, and was given the most spectacular funeral in London since that of Edward VII. When imprisoned, the suffragettes went on 'hunger-strike' and had to be subjected to the unpleasant process of forcible feeding. When their health was undermined by this process they had to be released, though it is said that some of them hoped to die of their prison treatment, if martyrdom would further their cause.

It is impossible to say whether these methods would have achieved their object because the coming of the first world war cut short this as well as other domestic excitements. During the war women served their country in so many directions, replacing men required for military service in all kinds of responsible and dangerous jobs, that the grant of women suffrage in the Franchise Act of 1918, carried during the last year of the war, met with scarcely any opposition. The vote was restricted to women over thirty, not because women take longer than men to acquire wisdom but because, if women were given votes like men, at the age of twenty-one, there would be a female majority in the electorate. Ten years later even this consequence of sex equality was accepted with equanimity, and the age qualification lowered to twenty-one. The Act of 1918 also entitled women to stand as candidates at parliamentary elections, the first to be elected being Lady Astor. The first woman cabinet minister was Miss Bondfield in the second Labour government, 1929-31. The number of women in the House of Commons has never been much more than a dozen, and shows little signs of increasing.

*Scotland and Wales.* A great deal is said about Ireland in this book but very little about Scotland or Wales, similarly there is much about South Africa and little about Canada or Australia. In each case the contrast illustrates the old saying, 'Happy is the

country that has no history', or 'whose history is dull' However, a few remarks about Scotland and Wales may serve to end this chapter

The most important development in modern Scottish history—it began long before the opening of our period—has been the development of Glasgow and the Clydeside as the greatest ship-building centre in the world. Into this one district half the inhabitants of Scotland have been concentrated. The slum conditions were, and perhaps still are, worse than in any other part of the British Isles. It is therefore not surprising that this district of Scotland has been conspicuous in the 'left wing' politics of Great Britain. It produced Keir Hardie, and the small group of 'Independents' led by Maxton in the parliaments of the period between the two wars all sat for constituencies in this district. Another characteristic of this district is that it has been largely recruited from Ireland. Just as Presbyterian Scots crossed to Ireland and colonized Ulster in the seventeenth century, so Catholic Irish from the time of the famine of 1846 onwards have drifted to Scotland where they constitute the poorest classes in the industrial districts. About one-fifth of the population of Scotland is now Irish-Catholic.

In the early 'eighties, when Parnell was making Irish Home Rule the chief issue of British politics, Scotland put forward a much more modest demand for some recognition of her political individuality, and in response Salisbury in 1885 (the 'Caretakers' government) created the post of Secretary for Scotland. In recent times the annual debate on the estimates of the Scottish Office has been by courtesy left to Scottish members, so that Scotland enjoys unofficially a certain measure of self government. There is to-day a Scottish Nationalist party demanding, on paper, a great deal more than this, but the demand is not likely to be pressed. It is a matter of historical sentiment more than practical politics.

Wales resembles Scotland to this extent, that she has in modern times crowded the bulk of her population in one industrial area, the South Wales coal field and its adjoining seaports, while the mountainous areas have actually declined in population. She also had at one time the semblance of a nationalist movement. When Lloyd George entered the House

of Commons in 1890 as a fiery young orator of twenty-seven he was more of a Welsh nationalist than a British Liberal. But Wales's main grievance was an ecclesiastical problem, a demand for the disestablishment of the section of the Church of England in Wales, and it has been satisfied. The Welsh Church Disestablishment bill was introduced in 1912 as twin brother of the Irish Home Rule bill of that year, to enjoy the benefits of the Parliament Act (as explained in Chapter VIII) and, unlike the Irish bill, it became law after being three times passed in the House of Commons. It was fiercely opposed by the Conservatives and the leaders of the English Church—and as the future proved, very foolishly; for the episcopal church in Wales has greatly benefited by the fact that it is now a purely Welsh institution.

Wales, like Scotland, has been prominent in 'left-wing' politics. If Scotland produced Keir Hardie, the founder of the Independent Labour Party, Wales produced A. J. Cook, who more than any other one man was the author of the General Strike of 1926.

## VII

### *The Empire, 1870-1914*

IF THERE is one thing about the British Empire more remarkable than its size it is its variety. It is instructive, for example, to visit in succession British West Africa (the Gold Coast and Nigeria) and the Union of South Africa. Both these regions have ties with Britain but they have no ties with or interest in each other. In British West Africa a few hundred civil servants, appointed and controlled by the Colonial Office, are engaged in ruling and guiding some twenty three million Africans and trying to teach them to build up a civilization in what will always be their own country. No Briton would dream of settling down and bringing up a family to be citizens of West Africa, the climate forbids it. In South Africa British and Dutch, in a self-governing community connected with but not controlled by the Dominions Office,<sup>1</sup> are building up a national state of their own. The position of the native Africans within their state constitutes their most difficult problem, but they refuse to treat the Africans as their equals, and we in Britain have no control over their policy. I can remember evoking surprise and displeasure at a South African dinner table by telling how I had seen British civil servants playing polo with the sons of a native prince in Northern Nigeria, such social intercourse of Black and White would be strongly condemned in South African society.

This chapter will survey very briefly the history of the principal regions of the British Empire during the period 1870 to 1914, beginning with the self governing dominions.

*Canada* The foundation of modern Canada is the Dominion of Canada Act, 1867. Before that date the term Canada covered no more than the two provinces of Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). The former was inhabited mainly by British and the latter by French settlers and their mutual relations

<sup>1</sup> The Dominions Office was separated from the Colonial Office shortly after the first great war.

bad been a source of endless difficulty. Should they be separate or united? Both systems had been tried without great success. The Act of 1867 established a federal system, with a federal government at the new capital of Ottawa for their joint concerns and provincial governments at Quebec and Toronto for local matters such as education in which the two provinces had entirely different requirements. But it did more than this. It included within the new Dominion<sup>1</sup> the old colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and the recently established colony of British Columbia. Nor was this all. The Canadian statesmen who designed the Dominion intended that it should be continuous from sea to sea, linking the St. Lawrence Valley with distant British Columbia.

The first step was to buy out the Hudson Bay Company, the great fur-trapping company founded in the reign of Charles II, which possessed rights over all the land outside the existing colonies. This was done in 1869. The next step, and much more difficult, was to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. Canadians looked southwards and saw that the United States had spread easily and rapidly across the Continent, the first transcontinental railway (1867) followed in the wake of the pioneers. But the Canadian problem was much more difficult, for between Lake Superior and the beginning of the prairie lands at Winnipeg lie six hundred miles of what is virtually desert. The investment of money in the railway was an act of patriotism and faith, for there were many doubters. As late as 1881, under the heading of 'The Canadian Pacific Bubble', a well-known London weekly paper warned its readers against putting money into this 'mad project'. However, the railway was completed in 1885. The chief credit for the achievement goes to two Scots Canadians, Sir John Macdonald, the prime minister, and Donald Smith, afterwards Lord Strathcona, a business man of great wealth who backed the scheme with all the finance at his disposal. Strung like beads on the string of the railway are now the prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, the greatest

<sup>1</sup> The Canadians wished to call their federation the Kingdom of Canada. The title was altered at the request of the foreign office which believed that the term 'kingdom' would give offence in the United States, with which we were at that time on very bad terms.

wheatfield in the world. They were colonized very largely from the United States, but these Americans were themselves in many cases sons of Canadians who had migrated to U.S.A. earlier in the century when Canadian development was at a standstill.

There was some opposition among the fur-trappers to the expansion of Canada—two rebellions, in fact, led by Louis Riel. It is a mark of the growing nationhood of Canada that the first in 1869, was suppressed by British troops stationed in the colony and the second fifteen years later, by the Canadians themselves.

A promising feature of Canadian history in the opening years of the twentieth century was the great increase of population. In 1900 only 30 per cent of emigrants from Great Britain settled within the empire, most of the rest going to the United States. In 1910 80 per cent settled within the empire, the bulk going to Canada. Between 1906 and 1915 Canada received two and a half million immigrants of which the great bulk were either British or the Americans already mentioned. The total population is now over ten millions.

The French community in Canada continues to grow in population, not by immigration but by the fertility of its natural increase. There is little social intercourse between French and British, though equally little ill-will. The two races live their own lives in their own provinces side by side, utterly unlike, the French being a simple, old-fashioned stay-at-home folk, offspring of pre-revolutionary France. Canada is an admirable illustration of the fact that two very different peoples can live happily together under one flag, a lesson much needed in Europe.

*Australia* When our period opens Australia consisted of six separate colonies—New South Wales (the oldest), Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and the island of Tasmania. The use of Australia for the transportation of convicts had been abolished in 1840 (in Tasmania not till 1853). The goldfields of New South Wales and Victoria, which helped to draw colonists to this distant continent had been opened in the middle of the century, those of Western Australia in 1890. All the colonies enjoyed self-government.

The great event of Australian history within this period is

the combination of its colonies in a single Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the principal author of the scheme being Sir Henry Parkes, a statesman of New South Wales. The main motive making for federation was the need of a common policy, the 'White Australia' policy, in the matter of immigration. The White population, almost entirely British, was still small, even to-day it is only seven millions, and the continent might easily be flooded by immigration from China and Japan unless rigid restriction was imposed. The jealousies of Sydney and Melbourne involved the creation of an entirely new city at Canberra to be the capital of the Commonwealth.

The Australians have been described (not by themselves) as the finest soldiers in the world, and their performances in the Libyan campaign of 1910-41 certainly tend to confirm this estimate.

*New Zealand* New Zealand, whose two islands occupy an area about equal to that of the British Isles, had been added to the empire in 1840, and the first thirty years of its history, at any rate so far as North Island was concerned, were very stormy owing to the conflicts between the British settlers and the Maoris, the attractive and warlike native race. South Island was practically uninhabited when the British arrived. One of the principal settlements there was organized and financed by the Church of England and given the name of Canterbury hence Canterbury lamb.

The Maori wars ended in 1870 with an agreement acceptable to both parties. The Maoris have representatives in the New Zealand parliament, a privilege enjoyed by no other non-European race in any British self governing dominion. Their numbers are few, only one twentieth of the total population, which is now over one million.

*South Africa* The conflicts of British and Dutch in South Africa have already occupied much space in this book, the story can be resumed here after the treaty concluding the South African war. In 1906 the British Liberal prime minister, Campbell Bannerman, decided, in spite of the misgivings of many members of his own cabinet and the opposition of nearly all British Conservatives, to grant the two conquered republics complete self government. Two years later a situation had

arisen which a foreigner might well have accounted strange. Three Dutch prime ministers for Cape Colony, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State, and their British colleague in Natal accepted an invitation from the British High Commissioner for South Africa to meet in conference and draw up a constitution for the Union of South Africa. It may be added that they received valuable help in their labours from a group of young British imperialists who had been brought out in the service of Milner, the previous High Commissioner, and were nicknamed 'Milner's kindergarten'.<sup>1</sup>



of Australia are altogether insignificant. South Africa on the other hand contains two million Europeans and six million Africans or Bantus, and these Bantus are a sturdy race, capable of much progress in civilization. We will not attempt to discuss, much less to pass judgment on, the almost insolubly difficult problems that this fact involves for the future of South Africa. Its ultimate solution depends on the answer to this question: is the Bantu really a permanently inferior type of human being by nature, or is his inferiority (which at present is very real) a temporary matter due to the accidents of his history hitherto? No one really knows the answer to this question. At present the Bantu is in all sorts of ways excluded from full citizenship in what his leaders regard as by rights his own country.

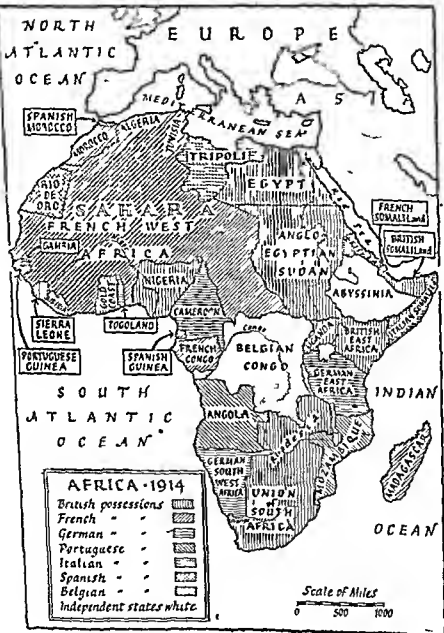
*India* The total white population of all the British dominions is only about half that of Great Britain to-day. India on the other hand contains a population nearly ten times that of Great Britain with varieties greater than are to be found in the whole length and breadth of Europe. We can only touch the fringe of this vast subject. The most interesting line to follow in the history of India between 1870 and 1914 is the early stages of the movement which has to-day produced a widespread and impatient demand for Indian self government, either in the form of complete independence or as a self governing dominion within the empire. The beginnings of the movement might be traced to the British decision in 1835 to provide India with an educational system on British lines and based on the English language and literature. Macaulay, who was mainly responsible for that decision, wrote 'It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown our system, that, having become instructed in European knowledge our subjects may, in some future age demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not, but never will I attempt to retard or avert it. Whenever it comes it will be the proudest day in English history.' It has come, and it involves difficulties that perhaps Macaulay did not foresee, but he was quite right in foreseeing that Indians familiarized with British ideas about liberty would demand liberty for themselves.

In 1885 there was founded the Indian National Congress which has since the end of the first great war become the principal

organ of anti-British agitation on behalf of the Hindus, who constitute nearly three-quarters of the population of India. Its founders were moderate men and the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, welcomed its establishment. In response to the demands of Congress Indian Local Councils were established to co-operate with the district officers of the Indian Civil Service in certain departments of their work (1888) and Advisory Councils with Indian members nominated by British governors of provinces were established to advise, but not to control, the governors (1892). Neither of these experiments gave much satisfaction. Congress drifted into a more definitely anti-British attitude under the leadership of Tilak, the forerunner of Gandhi.

The last of the great Viceroys of what may be called 'the old days' was Lord Curzon (1898-1905). No one was ever more whole-heartedly devoted to the welfare of India, but he undoubtedly thought of himself as a kind of Indian Emperor, and some of his measures caused anti-British agitation to assume wider dimensions than ever before. When Campbell Bannerman's Liberal government came into power shortly after Curzon's retirement the appointment of John Morley, famous for his advocacy of Irish Home Rule, as Secretary of State for India excited hopes that he might be going to give 'home rule' to India. But Morley had no such intentions, and the so-called Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 (Minto being the Viceroy who collaborated with Morley), though they created Indian provincial assemblies elected by limited classes of Indians, gave these assemblies no real control over the provincial governors. That was how things stood at the outbreak of the first great war. We shall have to return to the subject of India later on.

*Tropical Africa.* The Tropical African colonies are by far the newest of the great provinces of the British Empire. A map of Africa dated 1880 would show nothing but three very small patches on the western 'bulge', remnants of the old slave-trading bases. To these there has been added in West Africa the great wedge of Nigeria with its African population of twenty millions, and on the eastern side of Africa a continuous series of territories from the southern frontier of Egypt to the northern frontier of the Union of South Africa. Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika (acquired from Germany after the first great war), Nyasaland,



the two Rhodesias Why this sudden expansion of empire in Africa at the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth centuries?

It was not until the pioneering work of the great explorers was more or less complete that governments, British and Continental, realized the possibilities of Tropical Africa Livingstone, the greatest of them, died in 1873, and the message of the widely read books in which he recorded his travels was that what Africa needed was not only Christianity but also commerce and, where possible, European settlement Stanley carried on his work, exploring the whole Congo Basin He entered the employment of Leopold II of Belgium, and this sovereign became unfortunately a leader in the exploitation of Africa by European governments—unfortunately, because the Belgian Congo under his rule was the scene of abominable atrocities

There were good reasons why European governments should feel interested in tropical colonization at this time Industry was becoming more productive than ever before, and consequently seeking new markets It was also demanding increasing supplies of tropical products, rubber for belting and tyres, and oil for lubrication So there occurred what is commonly called the 'scramble for Africa', in which France, Germany, and Italy participated as well as Britain Unlike the scramble for America and India in earlier centuries it did not entail European war, though the rivalry of France and Germany in Morocco played a part in the events leading up to the first great war We have already said something of the British occupation of Rhodesia (1893) and the Sudan (1898) We add here something on the two principal ventures in West and East Africa—Nigeria and Kenya Uganda

*Nigeria* After the suppression of the British slave trade in 1807 one of the principal peace-time occupations of the British navy for the next sixty years was the suppression of slave trading carried on by ships of other nationalities It was to facilitate this work that we occupied Lagos, now the capital of Nigeria, in 1851, but for a long time it was an isolated post The real beginnings of British Nigeria date from the establishment of the Royal Niger Company under Sir George Goldie (a Manxman) in 1886 The company received powerful support from Chamberlain

when Colonial Secretary, and in 1899 the government took over the responsibilities of the company and established the protectorate of Nigeria, which for the first twenty years of the present century was governed by Sir Frederick Lugard, a soldier who had played important parts elsewhere in Tropical Africa and became one of the greatest of British colonial administrators. In early days Nigeria, and indeed West Africa generally, was known as 'the white man's grave'. Modern medicine, more particularly the discovery of the cause and consequently the means of protection against malaria, have altered all that, but it can never be a country for European settlement.

*East Africa* Our interest in Uganda began with missionary enterprise. In 1875 the explorer Stanley, who visited the country, persuaded the King of the Buganda, perhaps the more civilized of all Tropical African peoples, to issue an appeal for Church of England missionaries, which was published in the *Daily Telegraph*. Among those who responded was Mackay, an engineer as well as a missionary, who rendered the country great service in both capacities. But 'a new king arose who knew not Joseph'. The missionaries were in danger of their lives, and in 1890 the Imperial British East African Company, which had been founded to develop trade in East Africa, sent a small military expedition to the country. Uganda was annexed as a British protectorate in 1893 by Gladstone's last government, with Gladstone's very reluctant consent.

It remained to connect Uganda with the outside world, and a railway was built, mainly by labour imported from India, from the port of Mombasa. This railway ran through the highlands of what is now called Kenya, one of the very few districts of Tropical Africa suitable, by reason of its altitude, for permanent settlement by Europeans. It is a curious fact that Chamberlain offered these highlands to the Zionist Jews as an alternative to Palestine. They refused it, and there is to-day a small but fairly flourishing British community established there, with its capital at Nairobi.

*Railways* It will be noticed that in both East and West Africa, as also in Rhodesia, the foundations were laid by chartered companies, similar in many respects to the East India Company that had established British rule in India long ago. It is also

worth remarking that the last twenty years of the nineteenth century were a great age of extra European railway construction, the Trans Siberian railway, the Canadian Pacific, the railways from Capetown to Salisbury in Rhodesia, from Mombasa to Uganda, from Accra on the Gold Coast to Kumasi the capital of the warlike Ashantis, against whom we had had to undertake small campaigns in 1874 and again in 1896, and, a little later, the railway from Lagos to Kano in northern Nigeria on the southern edge of the Sahara. Later still and unfinished when the first great war broke out, German engineers were building the Baghdad railway to link Constantinople with the Persian Gulf.

## VIII

### *Pre-War*

#### I LORDS VERSUS COMMONS, 1906-11

IN 1906 we are within eight years of the first great war, and as we look back to-day it looks as if throughout those eight years the war was inevitably approaching nearer and nearer. But to the great mass of British people, including a majority of the politicians, this was not apparent. We had never been at war with Germany and were unable to see that she had any good ground for quarrelling with us, or indeed with any of her neighbours, since she was enjoying immense prosperity. Our long 'isolation' had rendered us unaccustomed to take any serious interest in continental politics and real knowledge of such matters was confined to specialists in the foreign office and elsewhere. There were, during these eight years, occasional spasms of tension and alarm, as will be shown, but they died down almost as quickly as they arose. Our attention was concentrated on our domestic affairs and it so happened that, as the war came silently nearer, these domestic affairs grew more and more noisy and exciting. In all these respects the pre war years, 1906-14, were very unlike the pre war years 1933-9.

*The Liberal Government* Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, the prime minister of the Liberal government which won so sweeping a victory in the election of January 1906, was an elderly and genial Scotsman. He had been elected leader seven years before when the party was at a low ebb, but he had never been regarded as a first rate man, comparable with any of the previous prime ministers mentioned in this book. Actually, he did better than any one expected. He died in 1908 and was succeeded by Asquith, a very able barrister of middle-class Yorkshire origin. Asquith was prime minister for a longer consecutive period (1908-16) than any predecessor since Lord Liverpool (1812-27), and it may be safely said that no prime minister ever had so

many and such varied difficulties to contend with. The Liberal government of 1906 is generally held to have contained more first-class men than any other before or since. Among them were Sir Edward Grey at the Foreign Office, Haldane at the War Office, Lloyd George at the Board of Trade, and Winston Churchill, then only thirty-two and not yet in the cabinet, but already Under-Secretary for the Colonies<sup>1</sup>. He has entered parliament as a Conservative four years earlier, but had gone over to the Liberals because of his opposition to Tariff Reform.

Four undertakings of this government have already been dealt with: the Algeciras conference and the strengthening of the Anglo-French *entente* (p. 59), the Trade Disputes Act (p. 67), the grant of self-government to the Transvaal (p. 82), and Morley's Indian reforms (p. 84).

*Army and Navy* The outstanding achievement of the government in its early years was Haldane's army reforms, a masterpiece of reorganization, the more so as they were made without any addition to the numbers of the army and an actual reduction in its cost. For the first time the army was provided with a headquarters 'general staff' or 'thinking machine'. An expeditionary force of six divisions ready for immediate service abroad was organized—the 'old contemptibles' of 1914. The territorial army, of semi-trained troops was created, and the university and school 'volunteer corps' were linked up with the War Office as Officer's Training Corps, to provide officers for the territorial army. Schoolboys began to make contact with 'Celt A', little realizing it would prove the first step to the trenches of Flanders. Haldane had been educated in Germany and often expressed his admiration for the great German philosophers of the past. When the war came the popular press turned on him as a pro-German and drove him out of political life, not because they really supposed he was one but because a campaign of that kind helps a newspaper's circulation.

<sup>1</sup> The term Under-Secretary has two different meanings. Sometimes (as here) it means parliamentary Under-Secretary, i.e. the assistant of the cabinet minister in his parliamentary work, at other times it means 'permanent' Under-Secretary, i.e. the head of the civil service in the department in question, and of course not a member of parliament or dependent on party politics, e.g. the Irish Under-Secretary Burke, mentioned on page 35.



In naval matters the government were at first much less wise. The *Dreadnought*, a new super battleship, had recently been launched, but the Liberal government cut down their predecessors' programme of further *Dreadnoughts* in the hope that the Germans would respond in the same spirit. This 'policy of appeasement' had the opposite effect from what was intended, and the Germans redoubled their efforts to get ahead of us. The public woke up to the situation in 1909 with the slogan, 'We want eight and we won't wait'. The government accepted the demand, laid down eight battleships that year and five in each of the two following years. These eighteen, completed in 1914, stood between Britain and destruction in the opening stages of the war.

*The House of Lords* The social policy of the government brought it at once in conflict with the House of Lords. On the whole it is a remarkable thing that, in spite of the establishment of a middle-class electorate in 1832 and a democratic electorate in 1867 and 1885, conflicts between the House of Commons and a House of Lords, consisting entirely of wealthy persons representing no one but themselves, should have been so few. It is an excellent illustration of the moderation of British politics. But during Gladstone's last government, a weak government with a minority of British support and dependent for its existence on Irish votes, the House of Lords had rejected a large number of government measures, acting frankly as a Conservative House against a Liberal government, and the country had approved by giving the Conservatives a solid majority at the next election. These facts seem to have had a disastrous effect on their lordships' outlook. They did not realize that what could be done against a weak and ill supported government like that of 1892-5 ought not to be done against a government that enjoyed the greatest majority of modern times.<sup>1</sup> So they rejected one important measure after another, the chief being an Education bill (1906), and a Licensing bill (1908), to reduce the number of public houses. They let through the Trade Disputes Act, because the Conservatives wanted to keep on good terms with the new Labour party, but otherwise the only social reform of

<sup>1</sup> Up to that date. It was surpassed by the majorities of 1918 and 1931, as will be recorded later.

importance they let through, and that unwillingly, was the first Old Age Pensions Act, giving five shillings a week to persons over seventy whose incomes did not exceed ten shillings a week—a small beginning of the present system (1909)

*The Conservative Party* It will be seen in the course of this chapter that in many respects throughout these eight years the Conservative party acted with great recklessness. In fact they lacked leadership. Joseph Chamberlain had been stricken down by a paralytic stroke in 1906 and took no further part in politics. He died in 1914, perhaps the most forcible figure in modern British politics among those who failed to reach the premiership. Balfour was discredited by his wobbling attitude over tariff reform and was in fact deposed from his leadership by the B M G ("Balfour must go") movement in 1911. His successor, Bonar Law, was a Canadian of Irish origin who had made money in Glasgow, an able but at this stage of his career a violent man. The leader of the party in the House of Lords, Lord Lansdowne, had been a good foreign secretary and principal author, on the British side, of the *entente* treaty with France, but in other respects he was a weak man with little understanding of British democracy.

*The Lloyd George Budget* So the Liberal government entered the year 1909 in a state of irritation against the House of Lords and also confronted with the problem of finding an extra £15,000,000 in taxation, a large sum in those days, to pay for the old age pensions and the eight new battleships. Lloyd George after a brilliant innings at the Board of Trade had become chancellor of the exchequer when Asquith became prime minister. It was his business to find the new money in his Budget of 1909. But he looked farther afield than that and sought to make his Budget a real instrument of social reform, after all, he thought, the essence of social reform is to take money away from the rich and spend it on the poor—provided you spend it wisely. He applied to income tax for the first time the principal of graduation (see p. 45), imposed the first taxes on motors and petrol, and introduced certain taxes on land which exasperated the Conservatives. But the Budget was really harmless enough, what roused opposition was not so much the Budget as the speeches its author delivered in its favour. Lloyd

George had at that time an exaggerated and emotional manner of speaking, learnt perhaps in the Welsh chapels he attended in his youth.<sup>1</sup> When he suggested, absurdly enough, that the Budget would be the first step to a heaven upon earth for the poor, it seemed natural to assume it might be the beginning of bell upon earth for the rich. In fact, Lloyd George was competing with the spokesmen of socialism and preaching what was called 'class war'. The upshot was that when the Budget, after passing the House of Commons, reached the House of Lords, the Lords rejected it by 350 votes to 75.

*Lords versus Commons* There is no law forbidding the Lords to reject the Budget just as there is no law forbidding the King to refuse his assent to a bill that has passed both Houses of Parliament. Indeed the fact that the Budget is presented to the Lords at all, and that all bills are laid before the throne for acceptance, shows that powers of rejection in both cases must have once existed. But the House of Lords had not interfered in any way with a Budget since 1860, when Gladstone first included all the taxes of the year in a single Finance Bill, and it was assumed that they would never do so. They had now joined battle with the Commons on ground far more favourable to the latter than the rejection of any ordinary bill could be. Asquith dissolved parliament with an undertaking that, if he was given a majority again, he would introduce a bill to limit the powers of the House of Lords. The election (January 1910) abolished the enormous majority the Liberals had enjoyed since 1906 and reduced Liberals and Conservatives to an exact equality, but forty Labour members and eighty Irish would support the Liberals in any measure directed against the House of Lords, so the result was a Conservative defeat.

*The Constitutional Conference* Before the new parliament had been sitting more than a few weeks Edward VII died and was succeeded by George V. The Budget rejected in 1909 had been passed at last, and the Parliament Bill, as it was called, would, if the Lords rejected it, bring the crown into party politics, for it was an understood principle that, in extreme cases, a prime

<sup>1</sup> His father had been an elementary schoolmaster, but he was brought up by his uncle, a shoemaker in a village near Cricketh, ten miles from Snowdon.

minister could ask the king to create sufficient new peers to carry through the House of Lords a measure clearly demanded by the people.<sup>1</sup> It was therefore decided to hold a secret conference of the leaders of both parties, four from each party, to see if they could find an agreed solution. At the best, this might solve the whole problem, at the worst, it would give the new king time to 'find his feet'. The Conference lasted through the summer months, but failed to reach agreement. Its secrets were well kept at the time, but we now know that the rival leaders agreed on the two main principles of the Parliament bill (1) that the Lords should in future have no power to touch 'money bills', i.e. Budgets, and (2) that any other bill should become law if it passed the House of Lords in three successive sessions, i.e. three years running. The breakdown occurred because the Conservatives insisted on excluding from these arrangements any bill altering the constitution itself, for example, a bill giving home rule to Ireland. Thus the Liberals could not accept even if they had wanted to, for Home Rule had been put back into their party programme and they were once again dependent on the Irish for their majority in the House of Commons.

*The Parliament Act* So parliament was again dissolved, and the election of December 1910 gave almost exactly the same result as that of January. Actually, the Liberals lost three seats and the Conservatives one, Labour and the Irish each gaining two. The Parliament bill was introduced and passed the House of Commons, and now the extraordinary state of indiscipline in the Conservative party revealed itself. Though both Balfour and Lansdowne were in favour of letting the bill through, a large section of the peers, the 'Die-hards'<sup>2</sup> as they were called, determined to defeat it if possible. Lansdowne had to persuade a number of his party to vote for the bill (instead of merely abstaining from voting at all) in order to get it through and avoid the alternative of having the House of Lords swamped by a host of Liberal new-comers. For Asquith not only had the King's assent

<sup>1</sup> It was a threat to create new peers that persuaded the House of Lords to accept the Reform Bill of 1832.

<sup>2</sup> The nickname of the Middlesex regiment, the 'Old 57th', it was now first introduced into politics and has been used since for any policy of obstinate opposition to change.

to the creation of peers, he had the lists of supporters of the bill who would accept peerages already made out.

The bill became law in August 1911. It dominated the politics of the next three years, as will be seen. Since 1914 its provisions have never had to be applied, partly because the House of Lords has learnt its lesson, and partly perhaps because (extraordinary as it may seem) never since the end of the first great war has there been a strong anti-Conservative majority in the House of Commons. The only anti-Conservative governments since 1918 have been two brief Labour governments, neither of them backed by an all-Labour majority.<sup>1</sup>

*Insurance Act* The same year (1911) saw the passage of an Act which has made very much more difference to the lives of ordinary people. Lloyd George's Health Insurance Act. The principle of the measure was compulsory contributions from employers and employed, paid by means of weekly stamps, and subsidized by a contribution from the state. 4d from the employee, 3d from the employer, and 2d from the state each week, so that the insured person got, as Lloyd George said, 'ninepence for fourpence'—or rather ninepence a week's worth of free doctor's treatment and weekly payments for his support when ill. The bill was opposed from many quarters, by the Labour party because they objected to the worker's contribution and wanted 'ninepence for nothing', by Conservative mistresses who objected to stamp licking, by doctors who thought they were not going to get enough profit out of it. Lloyd George met all opposition to the bill both inside and outside parliament with remarkable skill. In the popular eye he had by this time as completely eclipsed his leader Asquith as Joseph Chamberlain had eclipsed Salisbury and Balfour ten years before. The Health Insurance scheme, once it was launched, proved an immense success. At the same time an Unemployment Insurance Act was passed, limited to a small number of trades which suffered from regular 'seasonal' unemployment. General unemployment insurance did not come till after the first great war.

<sup>1</sup> The Parliament bill also reduced the legal maximum duration of a parliament from seven years to five. By a curious chance the first parliament subject to this limitation, i.e. that elected in December 1910, lasted longer than any parliament since the reign of Charles II, its life being prolonged by a further Act of Parliament until the first great war was over.

Two more valuable measures dealing with industry had been passed a year or two earlier and may be mentioned here, the establishment of Labour Exchanges, now called Employment Exchanges, through which men in need of employment and employers in need of men could establish contact, and the Trade Boards Act, by which the government took control of the wages paid in 'sweated' industries, i.e. industries mainly employing women in which wages were below any tolerable standard. Indeed by this measure the government undertook to do for the workers in these distressed industries what, in other industries, the workers were able to do for themselves through their trade unions.

*The Agadir Crisis* It was in 1911, once again, that the danger from Germany thrust itself more forcibly than before on British attention. Ever since the Conference of Algeciras France had been gradually extending her hold over Morocco. Suddenly a German gunboat arrived at Agadir, an obscure port on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, and the German government demanded 'compensation' for the commercial rights which, she claimed, she was losing owing to the French occupation of that country. Once again Britain stood firmly by France, and Lloyd George, after consultation with Grey, the foreign secretary, made a speech in which he declared plainly that Britain would fight rather than see France bullied by Germany. The words were the more effective as coming from Lloyd George, hitherto regarded as the most 'pacifist' member of the cabinet and the chief opponent of the big navy policy. The Germans were enraged but contented themselves with a small strip of territory which France was prepared to give them elsewhere, a transfer of territory from French Equatorial Africa to the German colony of Cameroon.

the Parliament Act got past the Dis-hards of the House of Lords; it was perhaps the tensest period of the three months crisis provoked by Germans over Agadir; and it contained the railway strike which paralysed for some days half the railways of the country (see p. 67). Also it was the hottest August ever recorded, the Greenwich thermometer rising one day to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Altogether a remarkable and disturbing month.

## II. ULSTER—AND SERBIA, 1912-14

During the period of two and a half years covered in this section two series of events ran side by side. In the British Isles a noisy series of events arising out of the third attempt to achieve Home Rule for Ireland, accompanied, one might say, by the shrill female outcries of the suffragettes and the deep growling of the miners' and dockers' strikes and other manifestations of industrial discontent; in Europe, the series of events which led up to the first great war. These made much noise in certain parts of Europe, but though they disturbed the foreign office and the small groups of peoples who took an intelligent interest in foreign affairs, they did not make very much impression on the general public of the British Isles. So little were they understood that Lloyd George himself, making a speech in the middle of July 1914, could say that the international sky had never looked 'more perfectly blue.' Both crises came to a head simultaneously at the end of that July. There was an imminent prospect of civil war in Ireland and of international war in Europe; and the second prospect swept the first clean off the map—for the time being. We will deal first with the Anglo-Irish story.

*Home Rule and Ulster.* In 1912 Asquith introduced his Home Rule bill, similar in character to the Gladstone bills which had been defeated in 1886 and 1893. The difference was that now, owing to the Parliament Act, the House of Lords could not

<sup>1</sup> No sensible person could have said this at any time in the three years before the outbreak of the second great war. It is a measure of the difference, not so much between the two pre-war periods, as of the British attitude towards them.

defeat the bill. They might reject it twice, but if it passed the House of Commons a third year in succession, it would become law over the head of the Lords. In place of the House of Lords Ulster, the north eastern province of Ireland stepped into the breach, and the cry raised by Lord Randolph Churchill in 1886, 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right', looked like coming true. Ulster had been colonized by Scots Presbyterians in the reign of James I. Of its nine counties three were almost untouched by Scots colonization and do not count for the purpose of this story, they are to-day in the Free State. Four had big protestant and anti Home Rule majorities. Two, Tyrone and Fermanagh, were fairly evenly divided, with small Catholic majorities. These six to-day constitute 'Northern Ireland', and are part of the 'United Kingdom' with members in the British parliament, though they also have a Home Rule system of their own, dating from 1921.

It seems obvious to-day that Asquith ought to have cut Northern Ireland out of the Home Rule bill from the start. There were two reasons why he did not do so. In the first place the Irish Nationalists insistently demanded the whole of Ireland for Home Rule, and many on both sides doubted whether an Ireland deprived of the comparatively rich northern district could become a 'paying concern' by itself. Secondly, the Ulster people did not, till near the end of the struggle, demand the separation of Ulster. What they wanted was to defeat Home Rule altogether. That was the aim of their leader, Carson, a Conservative lawyer from Dublin and not an Ulsterman at all, and of Bonar Law, the leader of the Conservative party and by family origin an Ulsterman. In fact both Irish factions stood for Ireland one and indivisible, and the two great British parties allowed themselves to be tied to the tails of the two Irish factions.

*The threat of rebellion* In the autumn of 1912 Ulster held a great demonstration at Belfast. Thousands signed a Covenant of resistance, modelled on the old Scottish National Covenant which the Scots had in 1638 bound themselves to resist the imposition of an English prayer book by Charles I. They proceeded to drill an army of volunteers and to arm it, with arms imported from Germany and elsewhere. A year later the importation of arms was forbidden, but they carried out, in April



1914, a sensational and successful gun running exploit at Larne. Prospects of rebellion as soon as the bill became law were serious, and it was well known that many highly placed officers in the British army were in full sympathy with the rebels. Indeed no district of the United Kingdom has supplied the British army with more distinguished officers than Ulster.

Meanwhile the southern Irish were also creating a volunteer army. It was not the work of the Irish Nationalist party in parliament, whose leader, Redmond, disliked it and relied on the British government to see Home Rule through. It was the work of extremists and republicans, who despised Redmond and his parliamentary nationalists and intended to get much more for Ireland than Asquith's bill gave. It was in fact the foundation of the Irish Republican army which fought for and secured virtual independence for an Irish Free State after the first great war was over.

In the summer of 1914, the Home Rule bill having passed the Commons for the third time, Asquith introduced an Amending bill, to exclude certain counties of Ulster from the bill. The question now was, what counties? The four or the six? On this miserably insignificant point a conference of the leaders of both parties failed to reach agreement on July 24. The cabinet met immediately afterwards to discuss the situation. When they were about to separate Sir Edward Grey, the foreign secretary, claimed their attention. Austria had sent an ultimatum to Serbia so worded that it seemed intended to force an Austro-Serbian war.

*German policy* Bismarck continued to rule, as Chancellor, over the German Empire he had made for nineteen years after the Franco-German war of 1870-71, and he always declared that Germany was a 'satisfied country'. But that was not the view of the Kaiser, William II, who became German Emperor at the age of thirty in 1888 and in less than two years got rid of Bismarck. The Kaiser aimed at *Weltmacht*, world power, and not merely the predominance in Europe which had contented Bismarck. He pursued his policy of aggrandizement in two directions at once, the building of a navy which should ultimately surpass that of Britain, and the *Drang nach Osten*, or push to the east. These

policies naturally produced first the Franco-Russian alliance of 1893, and then the Anglo-French *entente* of 1904, which had been supplemented by a much less firmly assured Anglo-Russian *entente* in 1907. These *ententes* were not alliances. They did not bind Britain to go to war with Germany in any particular circumstances, but the arrangements made with France in the years following the Anglo-French *entente* put us under a very strong obligation to support France if she was involved in a German war. The most important of these was the naval agreement of 1912 by which the British navy took entire charge of the defence of the North Sea and English Channel, while the French navy took entire charge of the defence of the Mediterranean against the fleet of Germany's ally Austria. If France was involved in war with Germany, it would be very difficult for Great Britain to leave the French Channel ports undefended while the French fleet was steaming back from the Mediterranean.

*Attempted Anglo-German Entente* Even after Agadir the British government did not despair of coming to an amicable settlement with Germany. Why should we not approach her with proposals similar to those with which we had approached France and Russia, namely a settlement of all existing points of conflict? Germany welcomed this proposal. The chief point of discussion was the Persian Gulf. The British had interests there, more particularly the pipe-line bringing oil from the Persian oil field, which was the principal source of supply of the British navy. Germany's interest was that she was building a railway through the then Turkish province of Irak down to the Persian Gulf. A settlement of British and German claims in the Persian Gulf apparently satisfactory to both parties was reached in the spring of 1914. Britain's object was to avert a European war. Germany's object was to secure British neutrality in a war she had already determined on. Germany at the same time pressed a proposal that both Britain and Germany should undertake to remain neutral if either was involved in war with another European power. This we could not undertake. It would bind us without binding Germany, because we were not in the least likely to be involved in war with any European power except Germany herself.

*Austria and Turkey* The German *Drang nach Osten* depended

on German control over Austria-Hungary and Turkey. Austria-Hungary had been Germany's ally ever since 1879, the year after the Treaty of Berlin. Indeed Austria-Hungary was a 'ramshackle empire' (the phrase is Lloyd-George's) containing a variety of nationalities, Germans, Magyars (i.e. Hungarians), Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Yugoslavs, Rumanians, and Italians, and it would not hold together indefinitely without German support. Turkey had come under German influence since the accession of William II. Germany had been assisting Turkey in the task of modernizing herself, German engineers and German capital built her railways, German soldiers organized her army. German control had become closer since a Turkish revolution in 1908 overthrew the Sultan Abdul Hamid (a bloodstained old rascal whose principle occupation was massacring Armenians with German support and in spite of British protests) and placed in power a group of adventurers commonly called the Young Turks. The whole combination—Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey—was summarized in the slogan 'Berlin to Baghdad', or more accurately Hamburg to the Persian Gulf, German power from the coast that faced Britain to the coast that faced India.

*Russia* Unfortunately for Germany Turkey was also a 'ramshackle empire', full of discontented non-Turkish nationalities, especially in her European provinces, and these were troubled waters in which Russia was actively fishing. The German line of aggrandizement from west to east was crossed by the Russian line of aggrandizement from north to south, aiming at the control of Constantinople and the straits leading into the Mediterranean. As a support to these ambitions Russia posed as the friend of Serbia, a state which had grievances against both Austria and Turkey, for there were millions of Serbs, or Yugoslavs,<sup>1</sup> in both the Austrian and the Turkish empires.

*The Balkan Wars of 1912, 1913* The break up of European Turkey was hastened by Italy, who in 1911 invaded the Turkish province of Libya. Italy had watched with extreme annoyance, thirty years before, the French occupation of Tunis, the province of Africa nearest to Sicily, and when France wanted to secure

<sup>1</sup> The term Yugoslav (Southern Slav) includes both the Serbs and two other closely allied peoples, the Croats and the Slovenes, at that time Austrian subjects, and since 1918 included in Yugoslavia.

Morocco she had agreed with Italy to favour her occupation of Libya, the one remaining Mediterranean province of Africa. The Libyan campaign encouraged the Balkan states, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, to combine forces and fall upon Turkey in the autumn of 1912. They won a rapid succession of victories, confined the Turkish armies to the Constantinople peninsula but fell out over the distribution of their spoils. Serbia had hoped to annex Albania, at that time a Turkish province and inhabited by a very primitive people, neither Serb nor Turkish, but Austria and Italy combined to forbid this. So Serbia poached upon Turkish territory mainly inhabited by Bulgars. Bulgaria objected, and made a foolish and treacherous attack on the Serbs. Serbs, Greeks, and Rumanians (who had not fought in the Balkan war of 1912) combined against Bulgaria in 1913 with the consequence that in the settlement that followed (Treaty of Bucharest) Bulgaria got less than her fair share.

The great powers watched these proceedings with intense anxiety, lest they should be drawn in and the war become European. None wanted a European war but Germany, and Germany was not quite ready. She raised in 1913 a special tax of £50,000,000 for the improvement of her army and its results would not be apparent till the following summer. The enlargement of the Kiel Canal to take ships of the *Dreadnought* type would also not be finished till then.

**Serbia** The storm centre was Serbia, baulked of Albania, but none the less more than doubled in size by the Treaty of Bucharest. Her ambition to bring the Jugoslavs of Austria Hungary within her domain was stronger than ever. Her special grievance concerned the province of Bosnia, inhabited by Serbs, transferred as a 'protectorate' from Turkey to Austria by the Treaty of Berlin, 1878, and fully incorporated in the Austrian dominions in breach of that treaty as recently as 1908. Many Austrian soldiers and statesmen held, probably quite rightly, that either Serbia must be smashed or Austria Hungary lose her Serb provinces. And if she lost them she would probably break up entirely into states corresponding to her different nationalities—as in fact happened at the end of the first great war. At the end of June 1914 the heir to the Austrian throne, the archduke Francis Ferdinand, visited Sarajevo, the Bosnian

capital, and was murdered there by a Serb. After a delay of nearly four weeks Austria sent an ultimatum to Serbia demanding what practically amounted to a surrender of her independence.

All this looks as if Austria-Hungary was the author of the war. But a war with Serbia would certainly involve war with Russia too, and Austria could not possibly undertake that single-handed. Before launching her ultimatum she had made certain of the support of Germany, and the real authors of the German decision were not the Kaiser who, as weak men will, flinched at the last moment from the result to which his policy had inevitably led, nor the feeble politician, Bethmann-Hollweg, who occupied as Chancellor the position once held by Bismarck, but the heads of the German army and Tirpitz, who had made the German navy. Their preparations were ready. They saw England apparently on the verge of an Irish civil war, France, with her politics in a state of rather greater confusion than usual, Russia not yet fully recovered from her defeat by Japan in 1904-5. They held that 'the day' had come.

*The last twelve days.* The events of the twelve days, July 23 to August 4, from the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia to the British ultimatum to Germany have been related in many books and in great detail, but really each step had become inevitable—except the last one. Austria declared war on Serbia, Russia declared war on Austria, Germany declared war on Russia and on France, knowing that France would declare war on her in accordance with the Franco-Russian Alliance, and wanting to get started at once. Churchill had retained the British fleet in mobilization—it was pure chance that it had already been mobilized for training purposes before the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. But down to August 2, when Germany made her declaration of war, half the members of the Liberal government still believed—strange as it must seem to-day—that we could and ought to keep out of the war unless we were directly attacked. These men certainly represented a large part of the opinion of the country. Asquith, Grey, Haldane, and Churchill, but not Lloyd George, were convinced that we must come in, and at once. Then, at the last stage, came the question of Belgium. Germany demanded the right to attack France through Belgium. Belgium refused, and on August 2 appealed to Britain as a

guarantor of Belgian neutrality by the Treaty of 1839. This appeal most fortunately awoke an instantaneous response from the vast majority of those who had not yet realized that it was our duty and our interest to enter the war in any case. The British ambassador to Germany was instructed to seek an interview with the German Chancellor, and demand that Germany should respect the neutrality of Belgium, which indeed she had already by that time broken. The German Chancellor was distressed and amazed that Britain should go to war for what he described as a 'scrap of paper'.

On August 3 Sir Edward Grey unfolded the position before the House of Commons in a very memorable speech which secured the assent of all but a very few Liberal and Labour 'pacifists'. Britain sent an ultimatum to Germany demanding the evacuation of Belgium by midnight of August 4. When that hour arrived and the ultimatum was unanswered the war had, so far as Britain was concerned, begun. As for the Home Rule bill, it was passed, together with an amending bill excluding the six counties, and both were put in 'cold storage' till the war was over.

## IX

# The First Great War

I 1914

AN ACCOUNT of the first great war in what is primarily a British history must not only describe in outline the events of the war but also give some account of what happened at home in Britain. The plan of what follows is to take the war year by year and to describe first of all the course of the fighting and secondly the chief events at home.

*The western front* The German plan of campaign, known as the Schlieffen plan from the name of its author, had been prepared many years before. The general idea was to hold Russia at bay and to destroy the power of France within six weeks by an overwhelming attack through Belgium. It seems very likely that if the German commanders had carried out the plan in all its details as Schlieffen designed it, they would have crushed France completely and driven her out of the war. But the German commander-in-chief, Moltke, nephew of the great soldier of the same name who had won Bismarck's wars, was an irresolute man in bad health. He made unwise alterations in the plan, and during its execution allowed the commanders of armies under him far too much liberty to make their own arrangements. In fact, he did not really command. As a result the German armies, after a month of triumphal advance through Belgium and northern France, when the fall of Paris seemed inevitable, were caught in a disorganized condition on a line stretching from outside Paris to Verdun. What followed, in the first ten days of September, is known as the battle of the Marne. Joffre, the French commander-in-chief, ordered a general attack and its results convinced the Germans that they must retreat. Paris was saved, but much more than Paris—the war itself. The long meditated Schlieffen *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war) had gone wrong. The British made the contribution to these events which,

though small, was exactly what had been promised. The expeditionary force was in its place at Mons on the left of the French armies by the middle of August, fought a successful rearguard action at Le Cateau during the retreat, and shared in the victory of the Marne. The French war plans had proved wrong in almost every respect, and their losses in the first month were terrific—600,000 casualties, by far the heaviest losses suffered by either side in any one month of the whole war. Coming after this disaster, the victory of the Marne may well be regarded as a miracle.

The Germans withdrew forty miles from the Marne behind the parallel river Aisne and proceeded to dig themselves in. Then each side tried to outflank the other, north westwards and south-eastwards, until entrenched positions confronted one another along 450 miles from the sea to Switzerland. During the autumn the vital question was *where* the north western end of the lines would reach the sea. The Germans were trying to push southwards beyond the Channel ports which were Britain's natural line of communication with her ally. This ambition was foiled by a great British defence known as the first battle of Ypres, and the line of the 'western front' reached the sea at a point between Dunkirk and Ostend. Ypres, to the east of which British armies fought for the next four years, was the only Belgian city not in German hands. The Germans retained not only all the rest of Belgium but a wide strip of northern France including the principal French coalfield and many industrial towns.

*The eastern front* The eastern front, where Russia confronted Germany and Austria Hungary was of far wider extent than the western front. The armies were less closely packed, and much less powerfully equipped. A Russian invasion of East Prussia was crushed, just before the battle of the Marne, at Tannenberg, but Russian armies overran all Austrian territory north of the Carpathian mountains. Meanwhile Turkey had entered the war on the German-side, and Russia was cut off from her Allies except by way of the Arctic ports.

*Sea power* The British fleet controlled the seas of the world from the first day of the war onwards. This meant that German commerce was swept from the seas whereas the commerce of



the Allies could carry on as usual, for there was at this stage no U boat warfare. Neutral commerce could of course do the same, though belligerents (which in this case meant the Allies) were entitled by international law to search neutral ships bound for enemy ports and to seize any goods which came under the heading of 'contraband'. The principle was clear, but a great deal of controversy developed between Allied and neutral governments, more particularly between the British and American governments, as to what goods should be classed as contraband. Under modern conditions, when nations fight not with small professional armies but with the whole of their man power and economic resources, almost any articles can be regarded as useful for war purposes and therefore might logically be treated as contraband. Fortunately the United States government had itself, fifty years before, when at war with 'the South' in the American Civil war, given a wide interpretation to the term contraband, when its navy searched the ships of European neutrals trading with the Southern states, and we were able to take advantage of these precedents. The British grand fleet, under the command of Jellicoe, had its base in Scapa Flow, a circular stretch of water surrounded by the Orkney Islands. Raids were made from time to time on the German bases beyond Heligoland, and the Germans replied with raids on British east coast towns, which did little damage, though they caused some evacuation of schools. Fear of naval bombardment, not air raids, was the cause of such evacuation as took place in 1914.

*The Pacific* On the outbreak of war Japan declared war on Germany in accordance with the Anglo-Japanese alliance, and proceeded to occupy Kiao-Chow on the Chinese coast, which Germany had secured from China sixteen years before. The German Pacific squadron, however, had not waited for the Japanese but had steamed out into the Pacific under its admiral, von Spee. This, the only German fleet at large, caused much anxiety to the British Admiralty in the first months of the war. One of its cruisers, the *Emden*, detached herself from the rest, and destroyed fourteen Allied merchant ships before she was herself tracked down and destroyed by an Australian cruiser, the *Sydney*. The rest of von Spee's squadron crossed the Pacific and in November destroyed the small British Pacific squadron

at Coronel off the coast of South America. They were themselves destroyed in December, by a British squadron sent out to deal with them, at the Falkland Islands, east of Cape Horn.

*Kitchener's armies* The first change in the British government due to the war was the appointment of Lord Kitchener as Secretary of State for War. The appointment of a professional soldier as political chief of one of the fighting departments was a novelty, and in some respects it did not work well. Kitchener had spent practically the whole of his career in the East; since the South African war he had been commander-in-chief in India, and had afterwards occupied Lord Cromer's post (see p. 33) in Egypt, he was quite unfamiliar with the Haldane reorganization of the War Office. None the less his presence there gave confidence to the British people as no one else could have done.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the war there was no conscription nor any thought of it. Kitchener at once issued an appeal for a hundred thousand volunteers 'for three years or the duration of the war'. The 'three years' caused surprise, for most people thought the war would be over long before that. Many people held that a modern European war 'all out' could not last more than a year at the outside. By November a million men had joined up and were being trained. Very gratifying, too, was the response to the call of war from every part of the British Empire.

*'Prussianism'* The general attitude to the war at first was one of 'business as usual'. People still thought of war as an affair of armies and navies, and imagined that most people would serve their country best by getting on with their peace-time jobs. Still, thousands were clamouring for war work, to 'do their bit'. The first war work for many was to entertain the 10,000 Belgian refugees who arrived in the early autumn. From them people heard first hand accounts of the German atrocities in Belgium, and began to realize that this was not merely a war between rival nations with similar ideas of right and wrong, but a war between two contrasted ideas of life, that we were up against an evil thing, 'Prussian militarism', which held that might is right.

*The Russian rumour* During the great retreat of August and

<sup>1</sup> Kitchener was drowned in 1916 when the ship in which he was travelling to Russia struck a mine.

amazing rumour ran through the country that 'the Russians' were coming round in vast numbers to support us on the western front. How the rumour arose is unknown, but it reached the German commanders and genuinely alarmed them. Quite possibly the thought of Russians in their rear helped to secure the German retreat from the Marne.

Even after the rumour was exploded the British public long retained a pathetic faith in the 'Russian steam roller', which would flatten out the enemy on his eastern flank and advance on Berlin. When, in the first autumn of the war, Bernard Shaw, in a pamphlet called *Commonsense on the war*, declared that Russia would fail and that Britain and France must win the war by their own efforts if at all, he gave great offence to most of his readers. But he proved right—a forecast as remarkable in its way as Kitchener's forecast that the war would last three years.

## II 1915

*The problem of 1915* The Germans had failed to win the war in 1914. Could the Allies win it in 1915, and if so, how? It was a difficult problem. The western front, like Wellington's lines of Torres Vedras though on an enormously larger scale, was a flankless front, resting on the sea at one end and neutral Switzerland at the other. The only possible attack was a frontal attack, and all the lessons of modern warfare showed that a frontal attack by existing methods against carefully prepared positions, bristling with machine-guns, was likely to prove a costly failure. If this conclusion were accepted, there were only two possible courses for the Allies. They must find new tactics, or a new strategy.

New tactics meant new instruments of attack which would defeat existing methods of defence. Such instruments were already being considered. The most important of them proved to be the 'tank', a term originally used for purposes of secrecy which has become the accepted name of these armoured 'caterpillar' tractors. They played an important part in winning the 1918 campaign, but as yet these machines had not got beyond the stage of discussion among experts.

New strategy meant attempts to defeat the enemy elsewhere

than on the western front. Granted that the enemy's front door was impregnable, were there not various back doors, held by his less formidable allies, Austria and Turkey, which might be broken down with the result that, in combination with Russia, we should take Germany in the rear? Several schemes of this kind were put forward, but that which won acceptance was a scheme to break through the Dardanelles, bombard Constantinople, and either drive Turkey out of the war or at least cut her off from her allies. Such a plan, if it succeeded, would have decisive results. It would reopen communications with Russia, enabling Russia to export her wheat and to import the munitions she imperatively needed if she was to resume her offensive. Moreover, not only the warlike little states of the Balkans, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Greece, but Italy also were carefully watching the war. All of them had ambitions, and were prepared to join in on the side of the Allies, if they felt confident that it would be the winning side. A successful offensive in the Mediterranean might well bring them all in, and between them Austria-Hungary might be simply rolled up, and Germany left to fight alone.

*The wrong solution.* On this question of a new strategy the opinion of experts both in Britain and France was unfortunately divided. Some held that the war must be won on the western front, and that any diversion of force to what were contemptuously called 'sideshows' would be wasted effort. This was naturally the French view, and it was shared by the leading British soldiers in France. Churchill vigorously pressed the claims of the attack on Constantinople. Kitchener hesitated between the rival views. The result was an unfortunate compromise between the two strategies. On the western front a number of frontal attacks were made, preceded by heavy bombardments which were meant to break down the enemy's defences, they never did so, all they did was to warn the enemy that the attack was coming. All these attacks, both French and British, were repulsed with heavy losses. The biggest attack in which the British took part in 1915 was the battle of Loos in September, the first battle in which a considerable number of the new 'Kitchener's armies' were engaged. Here we suffered 60,000 casualties, three times the number suffered by the Germans.

opposed to us, and gained—nothing. Meanwhile in the Mediterranean the offensive against Turkey, postponed too late and inadequately supplied, failed also.

*The attack on Constantinople* Early in the year Churchill, being told that no troops could be spared for the attack on Constantinople, secured the consent of the government to an attempt to force a passage through the Dardanelles by naval action only, using old battleships which were not required in the North Sea. The naval attack opened in January and was continued, off and on, for a month. Then the admiral in command fell ill, and his successor declared against continuing the operations. It is now known, on the post-war evidence of the enemy, that the Turkish forts had been nearly all destroyed and that the naval attack, if renewed with vigour, would have been completely successful.

Before the naval attack had been abandoned the British government decided that, after all, troops could be spared for the Turkish expedition, but more delays ensued and the brilliant landing operations on the Gallipoli peninsula, in which the Australian and New Zealand divisions played a glorious part, were not undertaken till the end of April. By that time the Turks had 42,000 men in the peninsula. A month earlier they had only 14,000 and the attack, instead of being panned down to the coast when it landed, might have carried all before it. It was the same story when reinforcements arrived and were landed at Suvla Bay in August. By that time the Turks had 120,000 men ready to meet the attack. The reinforcements could just as well have arrived in July, when the Turkish force was only 75,000. Even so the Suvla Bay attack failed by a very narrow margin.

*Serbia* At the end of the year the troops from Gallipoli were evacuated, without further loss,<sup>1</sup> and taken to Salonica, where a revolutionary pro-Ally movement, led by the Greek statesman, Venizelos, had declared for the Allies in defiance of the pro-German Greek king at Athens. Here the Allied forces were in time to receive the flying remnants of the Serbian army. In 1914 the Serbs had vigorously driven back the feeble Austrian attempts to carry out what had been their original purpose in provoking

<sup>1</sup> This was a very remarkable and unexpected achievement, comparable on its smaller scale with the evacuation at Dunkirk in 1940.

the war. But in the autumn of 1915 Germany took the matter in hand, with the assistance of the Bulgarians, who entered the war on the enemy side eager to avenge the injustice done them by the Serbs in 1913. So Serbia was for the time being wiped off the map of Europe, only to reappear three years later in an enlarged edition as Yugoslavia.

*Russia* The overwhelming of Serbia was an offshoot of defeats inflicted on the enormous but ill-equipped armies of Russia during the summer months. Falkenhayn, who had taken Moltke's place as chief of the German general staff, reversed in 1915 the policy pursued in 1914. He stood on the defensive in the west, with complete success, and threw his weight against Russia. The Russians were driven back practically the whole width of what was afterwards the republic of Poland, with enormous losses.

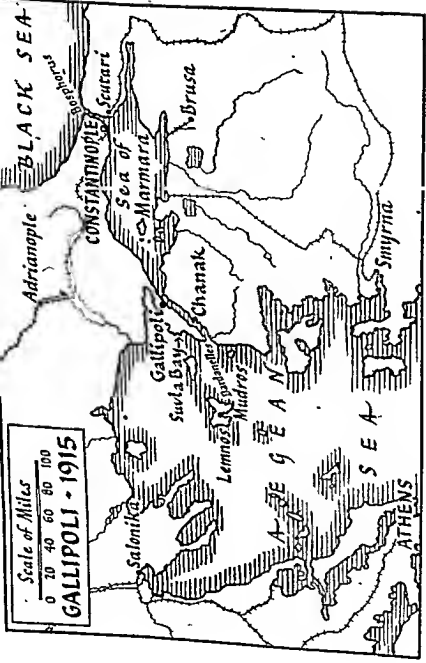
*Italy* The one bright spot was that Italy had, in the spring, joined the war on the Allied side. She was pursuing what her own prime minister called a policy of 'sacred egoism'. There were various territories mainly inhabited by Italians but still part of the Austrian empire—*Italia Irredenta* (Unredeemed Italy) as Italians called them. These were the southern Tirol, the city of Trieste, and the coast of the northern part of the far side of the Adriatic—Dalmatia. If Austria would grant Italy part of them, she would remain neutral. If Austria would grant Italy the whole of them, she would join Austria and Germany. But Austria would grant none, so Italy joined the Allies, who promised her, by the secret treaty of London, not only all these places but a bit more too. Thus a new 'front' was opened, but it was difficult for the Italians to achieve much, for the Austrians held an easily defended mountain frontier against them.

*The Coalition government* At home the main event of the spring was the formation of a national, or coalition, government. It seems obvious that, when the nation is united in carrying on a war, the political parties should be united also, but they had been on such bad terms with each other over the Irish question just before the war began that this would not have been possible at the start of the war. In May 1915, however, the leading Conservatives, Balfour, Bonar Law, and others, took office under

Scale of Miles

0 20 40 60 80 100

# GALLIPOLI - 1915



**Asquith** They made one definite stipulation, that Churchill should be removed from the Admiralty, where he had quarrelled with his 'First Sea Lord,'<sup>1</sup> Fisher, the designer of the *Dreadnoughts*. So Churchill left the Admiralty and, after a few months in a minor office, left the government altogether and went to serve on the western front. Lloyd George, hitherto Chancellor of the Exchequer, took over a new department, the Ministry of Munitions, to organize the manufacture of shells and guns and aircraft for the army. At that time there was no separate Air Force; the Royal Flying Corps was attached to the army.

**Strikes** The years immediately before the war had been a time of great strikes, and this industrial unrest unhappily continued into the war period. There were two principal causes of unrest, the rapid rise of prices which naturally led to demands for rises of wages, and the necessity of what was called 'dilution,' i.e. the introduction of hitherto unskilled workers and women into jobs which trade unions representing skilled crafts had hitherto reserved for their own members. There were serious strikes of munition workers on the Clyde and of miners in South Wales. In both cases the workers' demands were found to be reasonable and were ultimately granted, but, if there had been a better spirit of co-operation between workers, employers, and government, the strikes could have been avoided. Before the end of the year women were employed in hundreds of jobs, many of them both skilled and dangerous, to which they would never have been admitted before the war. Whatever else the war did, it enabled women to convince men of their right to the vote at parliamentary elections.

**U-boats** Another event of the spring was the sinking of the giant Cunard liner, the *Lusitania*. Fifteen hundred passengers and crew were drowned, among them many Americans. Earlier in the year the Germans had authorized their U boats to attack not only naval vessels but ships of commerce. However, they had not enough U boats at this stage to make the campaign effective, and after protests from America it died down for the time being.

**Conscription** By the end of 1915 three million men had  
<sup>1</sup> The First Sea Lord is the sailor chief of the permanent naval staff of the Admiralty.



voluntarily joined the fighting services, but the disastrous events of the year proved that the war might last several years yet, and conscription began to be faced as a disagreeable necessity. Many people who were thoroughly patriotic, especially trade unionists, hated the idea of conscription, which they regarded as a surrender of British liberty. They felt, too, that once imposed it would never be got rid of after the war. Others, however, realized that it was both fairer and more efficient than the voluntary system. It not only rounded up the 'shirkers' but enabled the government to retain in the workshops skilled men who were more valuable in the workshops than at the front. Indeed, once conscription was introduced, many skilled men who had volunteered and gone to the front were brought back to their workshops. The first step, in December 1915, was conscription of bachelors only. Full conscription came in the following spring.

### III 1916

*Verdun and the Somme* In 1915 the Germans had hammered the Russians but had failed to drive Russia out of the war. In 1916 they set themselves to hammer the French, and began in February a series of tremendous attacks on the French front in the neighbourhood of Verdun. The French stood their ground and suffered casualties<sup>1</sup> to the number of 400,000 in the first half of 1916, fifty per cent higher than the casualties of the German attack. On July 1 the new British armies attacked on the widest front occupied by any single battle of the western front since the line had been stabilized and entrenched in 1914—the battle of the Somme, which continued into the late autumn. In one sense the battle was a disappointment and a failure, for our casualties were heavier than those of the enemy, and though the Germans gave ground they remained undefeated. None the less this tremendous effort of the new British armies, composed very largely of men who had never handled a rifle before the war began, armies which as recently as the spring of 1916 Falkenhayn, the German commander-in-chief at this time, had professed to

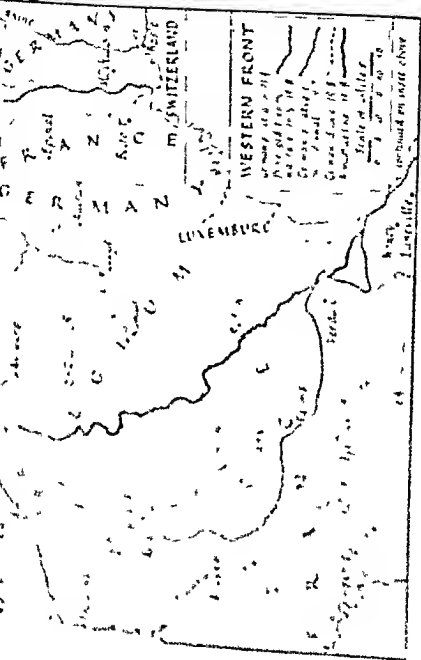
<sup>1</sup> The term 'casualties' includes, here as elsewhere, killed, wounded, and prisoners. When there is rapid retreat prisoners may be the largest item. Otherwise about half the casualties are probably men slightly wounded and able to rejoin the forces sooner or later.

regard with contempt, brought home to the Germans the fact that Great Britain was something more than a sea power, and that her armies, unlike those of the continental belligerents, had not yet reached their full strength

*Rumania* A month before the battle of the Somme, Brusilov, perhaps the best of the Russian generals, resumed the offensive against the Austrians, and drove them back in confusion until Germany could bring troops to the aid of her ally. Rumania was watching this battle with interest, for she coveted a large slice of Hungary, namely the province of Transylvania, which is mainly inhabited by Rumanians. It is said that if Rumania had entered the war alongside the Russians in June, their combined forces might have swept over the Hungarian plain. But she waited till August—too late. The Germans were ready for her. Like Serbia a year before, she was pinched to death between converging armies under German leadership, one from Hungary and one from Bulgaria. The addition of a new ally to our side had only meant the addition of a valuable territory, with its wheat and oil fields, to the enemy's resources.

*Jutland* On May 31 occurred the famous battle of Jutland, the only occasion when the rival grand fleets came within firing distance of one another. It is a mistake for either side to claim Jutland as a victory. The British suffered more casualties than the Germans, and the efficiency of the German range-finding and gunnery proved very high. But the German battleships did not attempt an engagement. They tried, by withdrawal, to draw us on to a German minefield, and Jellicoe refused to be drawn. He was, as Mr. Churchill said in his book published many years afterwards, 'the only man on either side who could have lost the war in an afternoon'. The destruction of British superiority at sea would have enabled Germany to starve us out in a very few months, whereas the total destruction of the German fleet would not have greatly affected the prospects of the war. Great Britain retained command of the seas after Jutland as before it. The most formidable menace was to come not from the great fleet we encountered at Jutland but from the U boats. That subject, however, belongs to 1917.

*War outside Europe*—Our supremacy at sea enabled us to



conquer the German colonies one by one. The only colony which cost a prolonged and difficult campaign was German East Africa (now Tanganyika), where General Smuts commanded a force of British, South African, and Indian troops. After the campaign was over he came to England and served as a member of the Imperial War Cabinet established by Lloyd George in 1917. Campaigns against Turkey in Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq) were also in progress, but these will be described as part of the events of 1917.

*War in the air* In 1916 a German Zeppelin (airship) was brought down on British soil for the first time. The German 'Zep' raids had begun in January 1915. After 1916, when we had shown that we could deal with these monsters, the Germans used planes for their raids. In the whole course of the war there were 109 raids over British soil, 1,400 people were killed and 3,400 injured, about one quarter of the numbers killed and injured in a single month in the worst period of 1940.

Something should be said here about air warfare in general in the first great war. When the war began the aeroplane was a mere 'infant', six years old, and though it matured rapidly in the stress of war it never attained anything approaching the power and reliability of the machines of 1940. In the first stages of the war, planes were used simply as scouts, to discover the position of enemy troops. British planes did useful work of this kind as early as the retreat from Mons. Later, these scouts were armed with machine-guns and fought each other in the air. The possibilities of what theorists called 'the vertical battle', aircraft attacking advancing troops and their communications, were only developed on a considerable scale in the last year of the war.

In 1916 there occurred the Easter Week rebellion of the Irish extremists in Dublin, a subject which had better be held over until we can tell the whole story of the events which led up to the establishment of the Irish Free State.

*Lloyd George, prime minister* At the end of the year Asquith resigned the premiership and was succeeded by Lloyd George. Though Asquith was a great figure in the parliamentary world he lacked one of the most necessary qualities of a national leader in war-time; he never impressed the public at large as a leader. Perhaps this deficiency was in part a result of his virtues, for he

was a singularly unselfish man, it was said of him that whenever things went wrong he took the blame, and whenever they went well he gave the credit for it to somebody else. Anyhow, the Northcliffe press, which at that time included *The Times* as well as the *Daily Mail* and other popular papers, had undermined public confidence in him, and it was best that he should go. Sir Edward Grey retired at the same time, having been foreign secretary for eleven years.

Lloyd George was Asquith's obvious successor, after his great achievements in organizing the production of munitions. He had a real gift for popular leadership, and a wonderful power of getting down to any particular problem that confronted him and solving it by sheer force of energy and ingenuity. He had displayed these gifts in connexion with his famous 1909 Budget, his Insurance bill, and his munitions campaign. His weakness as a statesman, as was shown after the end of the war, was that he had no clear principles, he lived, as it were, from hand to mouth. But he was the best man for the last two years of the war.

*The new government* It was a new government in more than one sense of the word. Hitherto British cabinets had contained fifteen or twenty members, most of them heads of the great departments of administration—war office, colonial office, and so on. Lloyd George's war cabinet contained only five members besides himself and all but one of these (Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer) were 'ministers without portfolio', i.e. they were not in charge of any particular department but simply formed a sort of supreme 'win the war' committee. Outside the war cabinet were not only the usual departmental ministers but also ministers in charge of new departments—Food, Labour, Shipping, and National Service. Many of the new ministers were not parliamentary politicians of the usual type but business men such as Lloyd George had already used to staff the Ministry of Munitions. Of the politician ministers the majority were Conservatives. The four members of the war cabinet, besides Lloyd George and Bonar Law, were Lord Curzon, formerly Viceroy of India, Lord Milner, formerly High Commissioner for South Africa, Sir Edward Carson, formerly 'chief rebel' of Ulster, and Arthur Henderson, a highly respected member of the Labour

party One of the most valuable innovations—and it has proved permanent—was the appointment of a Secretary to the Cabinet, to keep the record of its proceedings This post was given to a very able man, Sir Maurice Hankey, who retained it for nearly twenty years

It was in this year that 'summer time', putting forward the clocks an hour for the summer months, was first introduced.

#### IV 1917

This year was marked by three outstanding events, the Russian revolution, the attempt of Germany to starve out Britain by the U boat campaign and the failure of that attempt, and the entry of America into the war

*The Russian revolution* The outbreak of the Russian revolution was not due to communism—that came later—but to hatred of the war The Russian armies and the Russian people could endure it no longer The revolution began with strikes and demonstrations of rioters hungry for food in Petrograd The soldiers, ordered to suppress the riots, joined the rioters The Tsar abdicated in March, and a parliamentary government was formed, in which an eloquent lawyer named Kerensky took the lead This government professed itself anxious to carry on the war, and in fact the revolution in its early stages was warmly welcomed by public opinion in England But the Russian longing for peace at any price was too strong for Kerensky A Russian offensive, attempted in the summer, produced only mutiny, defeat, and wholesale desertion In the autumn a small gang of communists, led by Lenin and Trotsky, got control of the government by promising an immediate peace In December they made peace with Germany at Brest Litovsk, surrendering to her not only Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, but also the whole of southern Russia, which is called the Ukraine So Russia went out of the war

*The U boat campaign* In January 1917 the German government, despairing perhaps of winning decisive victory on land for they do not seem to have foreseen the Russian revolution), announced that they would sink all ships, Allied or neutral, in the seas round the British Isles We have seen how they opened

a U-boat campaign of this kind in 1915, but dropped it for fear of American intervention. They had then only about 30 U-boats. Now they had 300. They knew that the campaign would bring America into the war, but they reckoned that they could starve out Britain before America could play any important part in the fighting.

They nearly succeeded. April 1917, the month America entered the war, was the time of their greatest success. In February they sank over 400,000 tons of shipping, in March the same, in April 800,000. In that month one out of every four ships that left the British Isles never returned. If things had gone on like that for a few months more we should have been starved out, for quite apart from the importation of the raw materials of industry more than half our food supply has to be imported. But the situation was saved. The figures of loss fell as rapidly as they had risen, though from September onwards till the summer of 1918 they still averaged about 300,000 a month.

The number of U-boats destroyed in the last two years of the war was 130, which just about balanced the German construction of new ones. This shows that it was not mainly by destroying U-boats that we met the attack but by measures rendering the U-boats themselves less successful. Chief among these was the convoy system, whereby merchant ships travelled in groups, guarded by destroyers and directed by wireless information from the Admiralty. Another measure was the speeding-up of ship-building. Early in 1918 the world output of new ships, month by month, overtook and passed the monthly total of destruction. Food production at home could also be speeded up by ploughing for wheat thousands of acres that had once grown wheat but had been given over to pasture since the agricultural decline which began in the 'seventies. Thousands of new allotments grew potatoes. Food rationing was introduced. By these and other methods the situation was saved; but Germany came nearer to winning the war in the spring of 1917 than at any time since the battle of the Marne.

*America declares war.* The entry of America into the war was primarily due to the U-boat campaign, but there were many Americans, notably the President, Woodrow Wilson, who took a wider view and held that, when victory was won, America must

play a leading part in securing that such an assault on civilization should never occur again, that there must be established a League of Nations to prevent war, in which America must play a leading part

American armies played no part in the fighting till 1918, but the immediate value of America's entry was immense, and it was threefold. First, it gave hope the sorely tried armies of the Allies knew that, if they could hold out another year, new armies raised by what would become the most powerful nation in the world would pour in to support them. Secondly, financial aid hitherto Allied purchases from America had been made on the ordinary commercial basis, and the credit of the Allies, i.e. their capacity to pay, was running short. After America entered the war the inexhaustible credit of America was at the Allies' disposal, in other words, the Allies could pay American firms by borrowing from the American government. Thus were created the American debts which proved a formidable problem after the war was over. Thirdly, blockade so long as the powerful voice of America championed the rights of neutrals to trade with Germany we were compelled to let through our blockade many kinds of goods we would have preferred to seize. Now America was no longer interested in the rights of neutrals. Henceforth, therefore, our blockade could exercise an increasing stranglehold on Germany. Some consider that it was really the principal cause of the German collapse at the end of 1918.

*The western front* The French armies had, in 1917, a new and adventurous commander-in-chief, Nivelle, who prepared in collaboration with the British the biggest attack that had yet been made upon the western front. But Hindenburg and his chief of staff, Ludendorff, who had replaced Falkenhayn in control of all the German armies, executed a skilful retreat along the middle part of their line to new prepared positions, called the Hindenburg line. This gave the Germans an advantage, for their new positions were served with every convenience in the way of communications with their bases, whereas the country over which the Allies advanced was systematically blown to pieces by the retreating Germans. In fact it dislocated Nivelle's plan. None the less, he persisted in making a big French attack along a front east of the new line, from Soissons to Reims. It proved a complete failure,



and was followed by serious mutinies in the French army. This was the low-water mark of France during the war. Nivelle was dismissed, and succeeded by Petain.

For the rest of the year the British armies under Sir Douglas Haig, who had succeeded Sir John French as commander-in-chief at the end of 1915, attacked almost continuously, partly to divert German attention from the French. There were two brilliant successes, the capture of the Vimy Ridge where the Canadians specially distinguished themselves, and the capture of the Messines Ridge, but in the main the fighting, especially the latter part in the mud of a very wet autumn, achieved little and involved very heavy casualties. This autumn fighting goes by the name of the battle of Passchendaele.

Late in the autumn, on another part of our front, was fought a battle which will always rank as a landmark in the history of warfare, the battle of Cambrai, the first real tank battle. Tanks had been used the previous year in the battle of the Somme, but only as auxiliaries and without what their inventors considered their proper tactics. At Cambrai 381 tanks attacked the enemy at dawn without the usual warning of a preliminary bombardment. The whole German trench system was penetrated at once on a six-mile front and 10,000 prisoners taken at the cost of less than 1,500 British casualties. It proved impossible to follow up the success, but it was prophetic of the victories of the autumn of the next year.

*Caporetto* The Germans had beaten Russia, they had failed so far to beat the French or the British, in the autumn they made a determined attempt to beat the Italians. With German reinforcements and under German command a mainly Austrian army attacked the Italians in October and drove them in headlong rout—the battle of Caporetto. But, helped by the flooded rivers running down in parallel lines across the German line of advance, the Italians rallied to the north of Venice.

*Palestine and Mesopotamia* In the course of 1917 one British army, based on Egypt and the Suez Canal, entered Jerusalem under Allenby, and another, based on the Persian Gulf, entered Baghdad under Maude. Having failed in 1915 to defeat Turkey by striking her on the head (Constantinople) we were laboriously advancing up her two long Asiatic 'legs', Syria and Irak. The

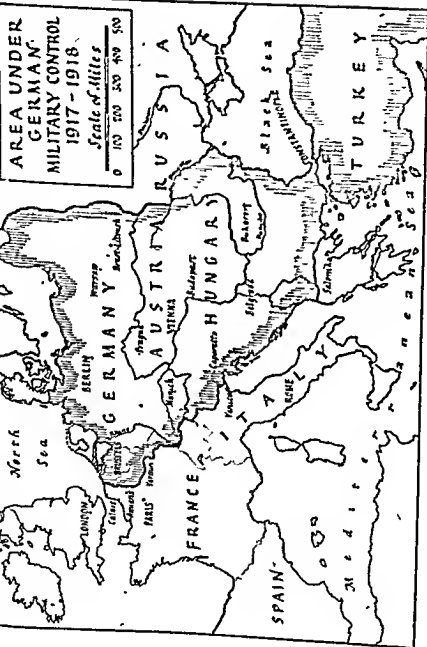
latter of these campaigns had had a long and chequered history. Beginning as a defence of our Persian oil supply it had in 1915 advanced too rashly up the Tigris valley, and a British force had been surrounded, besieged, and compelled to surrender at Kut. The sufferings inflicted on the rank and file of the army that surrendered at Kut make one of the most grievous tragedies of the war. But militarily the misfortune had now been retrieved by Maude's victorious advance.

'*Pacifism*' So the war dragged on, and there seemed no end to it. Whatever might happen in remote places, the German western front seemed as unconquerable as ever. Each year, much more than a million young men (taking all the belligerents together) were killed, yet each year brought a new 'age group' into the field. Would it ever end, and if so how? It was only natural that in every country voices should be raised, asking whether it would not be better to try to call a halt, and terminate the war as a drawn battle. In Germany such voices were ruthlessly suppressed, in Britain they were allowed to make themselves heard. In November 1917 Lord Lansdowne, formerly foreign secretary in a Conservative government, published a letter in the *Daily Telegraph* suggesting that a peace without victory might be not only possible but in the circumstances the best solution. The response showed that public opinion was overwhelmingly against him. Whatever might seem the prospects, we must fight on for complete victory.

Those who agreed with Lansdowne were called 'pacifists', a word also used to describe an entirely different class of people, the 'conscientious objectors' who, being men of military age, refused military service. Of these there were in all 16,000, the great majority of whom accepted alternative forms of non-combatant service, often service as stretcher-bearers at the front which was perhaps as dangerous as ordinary military service but did not involve actually killing the enemy. 1,300 refused any form of service, and were sent to prison.

#### V 1918

*The German offensives* Germany had now one, and only one, chance of victory, and a limited time within which to secure it,



AREA UNDER  
GERMAN  
MILITARY CONTROL  
1917-1918

Scale of Miles

0 100 200 300 400 500

for the blockade was wearing her down, and long before the year was out America would have a substantial and ever growing army in France. However, Russia had made peace, and all the German armies from the eastern front were being transferred to the west. For the first time since 1914 Germany had a superiority of numbers on the western front. Unless she could win decisive victory before the Americans arrived she could never win.

Between March 21 and midsummer the Germans made three tremendous assaults on widely separated sections of the Allied front, the first two against the British and the third against the French. All three swept right over the opposing systems of defence as no Allied offensive in the previous three years had done, except on its own small scale the tank attack at Cambrai. The first German attack, when 800,000 Germans were launched against 300,000 British, was on the southern end of the British lines from Arras southwards. It might have pierced to Amiens and secured a complete separation of the British and French armies. The second attack, on April 9, just south of Ypres, might have driven through to the coast and pinned the northern section of our armies against Calais and Boulogne. The third attack, against the French in Champagne on May 27, brought the Germans back again to the Marne, and might have cut the French line in two and led to the fall of Paris. Each of these three attacks was held after a desperate week, and the Germans were left with three big "bulges" to defend, the embarrassing consequence of partial success.

One result of the first of these German attacks had been the establishment of unity of command over all Allied forces on the western front. Under the new system Haig and Petain remained commanders of their own national armies, but Foch was given supreme control over both.

Meanwhile, after the first attack, the Allied governments had sent an S.O.S. to America, and from April onwards American troops began to pour into France at the rate, we were told, of one American every five seconds, day and night. A little arithmetic will show that about 2,000,000 American troops had arrived by Armistice day, about two-thirds of whom took part in the fighting.

*Allied victory* In July the Germans made a fourth attack, on

the French. It failed, and Foch replied at once with a successful counter-attack, known as the second battle of the Marne. Then the British attacked in front of Amiens on August 8. This British attack, with 450 tanks, came as a complete surprise, and Ludendorff in his Memoirs afterwards declared that August 8, 1918, was 'the black day of the war'. From that date onwards Allied offensives followed in rapid succession, now here and now there. The enemy were never given time to recover. We had them on the run. The retreat became general and continuous.

Then things began to happen on other fronts. The Allied armies in front of Salonica, British, French, Serb, Greek, and Italian, the most inactive of all the fronts, attacked the Bulgarians, who disobeyed their German commander and refused to fight in a war they regarded as already lost. At the end of September Ludendorff received, almost simultaneously, the news that Bulgaria had made peace and that his own Hindenburg line had been broken through by the Allied advance. He realized that the war was lost, and instructed the German government to make peace as quickly as possible on any terms they could get. The German government approached President Wilson, asking him to arrange terms of an armistice between Germany and the Allies. Thus negotiations began which, after five or six weeks, concluded in the armistice of November 11.

Meanwhile the fighting continued and the Germans, driven ever backward into Belgium, saw their Allies collapsing too. The Turks were routed in Palestine and Mesopotamia, and signed an armistice at the end of October. The Austrians collapsed before an Italian attack and signed an armistice in the first week of November. The German fleet mutinied, when ordered to put to sea for a 'suicide battle'. The Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland. An unparalleled war was ending in an unparalleled victory.

*The Armistice* An armistice is simply a stop-fighting agreement. The arrangement of permanent terms of peace takes a long time and requires the whole time attention of the leading statesmen. It is not possible to work out all the details of a peace treaty while still conducting a war, hence the use of an armistice. An armistice may be, and sometimes is, followed by a resumption of hostilities, but the victorious Allies of 1918 were not going

to take any risk of that. They insisted, as a condition of the armistice, that Germany should surrender her battleships and an immense quantity of aeroplanes, guns, and ammunition.

The Allies might, had they wished, have refused to make any promises in return. But actually they did promise, not in the terms of the armistice but in the correspondence that preceded it, that the terms of the peace treaty should be in accordance with the policy described by President Wilson in certain speeches he had delivered since America entered the war. The most important of these statements was the so-called Fourteen Points,<sup>1</sup> which included (i) the establishment of a League of Nations, (ii) disarmament, (iii) frontiers to be drawn in accordance with the principle of nationality and the will of the inhabitants. This last point clearly involved the separation from Germany of Alsace-Lorraine and her Polish provinces, and also the complete dismemberment of Austria-Hungary. The European Allies added to Wilson's points one of their own, that they should be entitled to exact from Germany reparations (i.e. payment) for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies on land, at sea, and from the air. This would include payment for the devastated towns along the western front in France and Belgium and for ships, other than naval vessels, sunk by submarines.

These undertakings have importance because the Germans afterwards maintained that the peace terms imposed on their country were inconsistent with the pledges given at the armistice. The fact is that Wilson's 'Points' were general statements, capable of a variety of interpretations when it came to details, suitable enough in a public speech but unsuited to be the terms of a bargain between hostile nations. The Allies would have been wiser if they had refused to tie themselves to any set of formulae conditioning the future peace settlement. They did so, however, not to oblige Germany, who was at their mercy, but to gratify the apparently all-powerful American president.

*The damage of war.* Thus ended the greatest and most destructive war that had ever been fought. The damage done by this war can never be accurately estimated, for one of the heaviest items in the damage, perhaps the heaviest, was the damage done to the minds of the nations involved—the longing for vengeance,

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I

easily gratified at once in the case of the victors, slowly smouldering and biding its time in the case of the vanquished. The war that broke out in 1939 may fairly be regarded as part of the damage done by the war of 1914-18.

However, some estimates may be given of the actual destruction of human life in the war. Germany lost 2,300,000, Austria 1,500,000, Turkey 500,000. Among the Allies Russia lost over 4,000,000, France 1,300,000, the British Empire 1,000,000, Italy 700,000, and Serbia 800,000—relatively to her population much the highest figure of all. But for the wonderful skill of surgery in saving the wounded and of medicine in averting or controlling epidemic disease the loss would have been far greater. This was probably the only war in history in which deaths by disease fell short of deaths by wounds, and they fell very far short of it, especially on the western front. None the less the deaths by disease and famine among civil populations, especially in eastern Europe, directly due to the war and occurring to a large extent after the fighting finished, amounted to several millions.

*The Peace Treaties<sup>1</sup>*

THIS BOOK is not a history of Europe but of Britain. The last chapter had to be filled with European affairs because Britain was involved in a European war. When the war was over we hoped that we should be able to get back to our own affairs again. 'Prussian militarism' was completely destroyed, so far as defeat could destroy it. No doubt the peace treaties had to be made, and for that purpose a great international conference of the Allied nations was to meet in Paris early in the new year. But once the treaties were made we hoped that our duties towards the continent would be limited to periodical attendance at a well-behaved League of Nations. The peace treaties failed to achieve this desirable result. The problems and the woes of Europe continued to intrude upon our attention, until twenty-one years later the war had to be fought all over again. Some people have blamed the peace treaties for this lamentable result—whether justly or not the reader must judge for himself when he has got to the end of the book.

*General election of 1918* But first of all it was necessary to hold a general election—three years overdue. The election of December 1918 was fought under altogether abnormal conditions. Not only was every one exhausted and overstrained by the anxieties and triumphs of the war, but the party system, which had been the basis of all previous elections, had practically disappeared, for the leader of one half of the Liberal party was prime minister of a coalition, or national, government containing all the leading Conservatives. Lloyd George and Bonar Law asked for a continuance of their lease of power, and issued a letter of approval, nicknamed a 'coupon', to all candidates, whether Liberal or Conservative, whom they regarded as reliable.

<sup>1</sup> The plural is used because there were five treaties, treaty of Versailles with Germany, treaty of Saint Germain with Austria, and other treaties with Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey.



supporters. They found the electorate greedy for vengeance upon Germany, and they responded to its mood. 'Hang the Kaiser' and 'Make Germany pay for the whole cost of the war' were the favourite slogans. The result was, of course, an overwhelming victory—478 Coalitionists, 59 Labour men, and only 27 'independent Liberals' under Asquith's leadership were elected.<sup>1</sup>

*The Big Four* The peace conference was the largest gathering of its kind that had ever met, but the main decisions were in the hands of the Big Four, as they were called—Clemenceau, prime minister of France, Wilson, president of the United States, Orlando, prime minister of Italy, and Lloyd George.

Clemenceau was a very old and resolute man, who knew what he wanted, though he did not know that what he wanted was impossible. He wanted to punish Germany so that she would never rise again, and France would recover her position, lost since 1870, as the leading continental power. Permanent security for France was the keynote of his policy, but since there were only forty million Frenchmen and seventy million Germans, could France ever be permanently secure except through friendship with Germany? But Clemenceau regarded friendship with 'the Boches' much as St. George would have regarded the idea of friendship with the Dragon.

Wilson also knew what he wanted—justice for all, winners and losers alike, disarmament, a League of Nations, a new world order in which the United States would play a leading part. He did not realize that America would refuse to play the part he was assigning her, that she was determined to retire into her own continent and leave Europe to stew in its own juice.

Orlando simply wanted various territories for Italy, and he got most of them, though not enough to satisfy 'sacred egoism'.

As for Lloyd George, it is hard to say what he wanted, and that was his great weakness at the conference. He did not really believe in the Clemenceau policy of mere vengeance, but it was on a policy of mere vengeance that he had just won his general election.

*Germany excluded from the conference* Three of the great powers who had entered the war in 1914 were unrepresented.

<sup>1</sup> This was the first election in which women voted. The woman suffrage movement was described in Chapter VI.

Austria-Hungary had disappeared from the map, Russia was in the grip of a communist revolution, Germany was excluded until the Allies had settled the terms among themselves. They were then presented to Germany for acceptance or rejection—which meant acceptance or starvation, for the blockade was not completely raised until the terms were accepted. For this reason the Germans have ever since denounced the treaty as a *Diktat*, or dictated peace. But surely any one who believes in war as a proper instrument of policy, as the Germans did under the Kaiser and under Hitler, cannot object to a *Diktat*, for the whole object of war is to enable one to dictate to one's enemies. In fact what the Germans really objected to was not so much the terms of the treaty as the fact that they had been beaten. Still, it would have been better for many obvious reasons if the leaders of the new German republic had been allowed to take part in the proceedings of the peace conference.

The peace conference had to deal with four main subjects

Territorial settlement, frontiers what may be called the geography of the treaties,

The League of Nations, the attempt to provide a means by which quarrels such as had hitherto resulted in wars might be settled peacefully,

Security and disarmament, questions closely related to each other and to the prospects of future peace,

Reparations, or the attempt to make the vanquished pay at any rate some part of the cost of the war

*The territorial settlement* The best way of studying the territorial settlement is to make a careful comparison between a pre-war and a post war map. Germany surrendered Alsace and Lorraine to France, and for fifteen years the rich coalfield of the Saar valley to the north of Lorraine was to be French property, the district itself being governed by an international commission appointed by the League of Nations. France wanted to annex all German territory up to the Rhine, but this was vetoed by Britain and America. On the east Germany had to surrender to the newly created republic of Poland all territories where Polish population predominated. The most irritating part of this decision for the Germans was that it gave Poland a 'corridor' to the sea, cutting off East Prussia from the rest of Germany. The

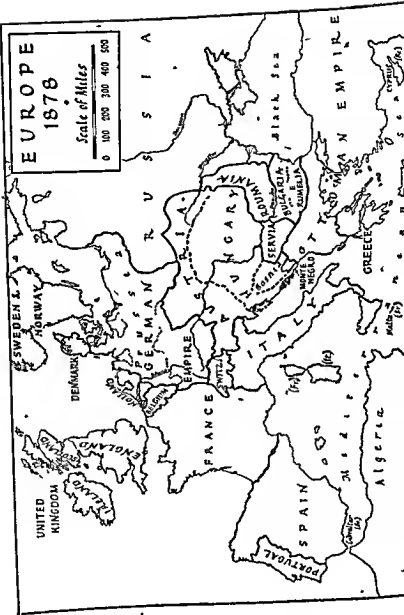
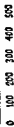
city of Danzig, with an almost entirely German population, was to be a 'free city', under League of Nations control. Its harbour and docks were to belong to Poland, as being her natural outlet to the sea.

In central Europe a number of entirely new states were brought into existence between Germany and Russia. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland. Where had once been Austria-Hungary there was now a small Austrian republic containing the German-speaking districts, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and provinces added to Italy, Rumania, and Serbia (Yugoslavia). In the Balkans Bulgaria lost a strip of coast to Greece, who was also allotted territory in Anatolia (Asia Minor) which she ultimately failed to secure from Turkey. Turkey lost her long Asiatic extensions, one of them becoming the Kingdom of Iraq, and the other the French province of Syria, and Palestine, where Britain had, rather rashly, undertaken to establish a 'national home' for the Jews.

For many, or most, of these arrangements the peace conference can be neither praised or blamed. They had already been established as the result of local revolutions, and the peace conference simply accepted the facts as it found them and offered solutions of boundary disputes, which were not always accepted by the disputants. The general result was a triumph of the principle of nationalism, or 'self-determination', which was a prominent feature of Wilson's Fourteen Points. Never before had the map of Europe corresponded so closely to the conscious wishes of its inhabitants. That was all to the good, but there were also serious drawbacks. For one thing, the spirit of nationalism went too far and nearly everywhere set itself to persecute in one way or another the 'minorities' of different nationality within the new frontiers, for the dividing lines between national groups are never clear cut. Secondly, these numerous new states set themselves to compete industrially with their neighbours, and to erect tariff barriers impeding the natural course of trade. It has often been remarked that if the forty-eight states of U.S.A. had been allowed to erect tariff barriers against each other, U.S.A. would certainly not be to-day the richest country in the world. The multiplication of frontiers and tariffs impoverished the new Europe. Thirdly, the existence of large numbers of small states

EUROPE  
1878

Scale of Miles



# EUROPE 1920

PL. = Plebiscite areas

Scale of Miles

0 100 200 300 400 500

UNION OF

SOCIALIST

REPUBLICS

RUSSIAN

REPUBLICS

BLACK SEA

INTERNATIONAL ZONE

TURKEY

ALBANIA

YUGOSLAVIA

BULGARIA

ROMANIA

HUNGARY

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

AUSTRIA

GERMANY

POLAND

FINLAND

SWEDEN

NORWAY

DENMARK

IRELAND

UNITED KINGDOM

ENGLAND

SCOTLAND

WALLES

IRELAND

FRANCE

SPAIN

PORTUGAL

ITALY

GREECE

ALBANIA

BULGARIA

ROMANIA

HUNGARY

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

AUSTRIA

GERMANY

POLAND

FINLAND

FINLAND

SWEDEN

NORWAY

DENMARK

IRELAND

UNITED KINGDOM

ENGLAND

SCOTLAND

WALLES

IRELAND

FRANCE

SPAIN

PORTUGAL

ITALY

GREECE

ALBANIA

BULGARIA

ROMANIA

HUNGARY

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

AUSTRIA

GERMANY

POLAND

FINLAND

was a source of political instability. These small states could not strengthen a League of Nations, they could only look to it for protection. In a peaceful world great and small states may live happily side by side in entire independence of each other. In a world such as ours small states have proved merely a temptation to the greed of the unsatisfied large ones.

*The League of Nations* The scheme of the League of Nations had been worked out in the main by British statesmen and writers during the long years of the war, but it was President Wilson who insisted on the inclusion of its 'covenant' and constitution in the peace treaties themselves. He hoped that, when the passions of war cooled down, the League would correct the faults of the treaties.

The organs of the League were to be an Assembly, a Council, and a Secretariat. The Assembly is<sup>1</sup> a kind of debating society of representatives of all the states that are members of the League, over fifty in number as they soon became. It has usually met once a year. The Council is a smaller body meeting three or four times a year and consisting of the representatives of the great powers with the representatives of certain other states elected for a period of years by the Assembly. The Secretariat is a civil service of salaried officials, permanently employed in carrying on the business of the League at its headquarters in Geneva. Its ranks are recruited from the citizens of all the nations that have joined the League, and its first Head was an Englishman, Sir Eric Drummond.

The definition of the powers of the League was a most difficult matter. Some people spoke of it as if it were a super national parliament, but that was just what it could not be, because the nations continued to be sovereign states, recognizing no higher authority than themselves. Members of the League who disagreed with its decisions did not hold themselves bound to accept those decisions. Great Britain (to take an extreme but perfectly fair example) would not feel bound to go to war with the United States because a majority of members of the Council or of the

<sup>1</sup> I have written of the League in the present tense as though it still existed. In theory it still does (1941). Whether it will be revived after the present war no one can at present say. For an abbreviated version of the League Constitution, see Appendix II.

Assembly of the League decided that she should do so. Thus the League could never act in a crisis unless all its members, or rather all its important members, were agreed, and this they never were.

From the start the League suffered from two serious handicaps. The first was the exclusion of Germany—at the demand of France. Thus in the first years of the peace the League, instead of helping to obliterate the division of victor and vanquished, only preserved and prolonged it. It was a League of Victors, and their friends.<sup>6</sup> The second misfortune was the refusal of America to join the League at all. When Wilson returned to America with the treaty, the American Senate rejected it. 'America' went back to America and intended to stay there.

*Mandates* Closely connected with the League of Nations was the system of 'Mandates'. By the treaties Germany was deprived of all her colonies, and large Asiatic provinces were lopped off the Turkish empire. These were not to be annexed outright by the victors but entrusted to them under 'mandates', with responsibility to a committee of the League of Nations. It was a step towards the ideal which demands that the backward and primitive peoples of the world shall not be treated as the 'property' of various imperialist powers and exploited for the benefit of their masters, but governed on the principle that (in the words of the treaty) 'the well being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization'. Under this system German East Africa went to Britain, German South West Africa to the Union of South Africa, and the West African German colonies mainly to France and partly to Britain, where they were annexed to existing French and British colonies. Various small German colonies in the Pacific went to Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

The distribution of the ex-Turkish territory we have already described. These mandates of formerly Turkish territory were to be of a temporary character. Iraq has already secured her independence, and Great Britain would gladly withdraw from Palestine if there was any prospect of the Jewish immigrants and the Arab population living peaceably together.

*Security* Nothing in the treaty as so far described seemed to

give France the security against German attack in the future which was her real need. Her demand for a frontier along the Rhine from Holland to Alsace had been refused. Instead, the Allies made two offers with which she had to be content. All German territory west of the Rhine and a strip thirty miles wide to the east of it was to be occupied by Allied troops for periods of five, ten, and fifteen years, the withdrawal being in three sections. After the withdrawal of the Allied troops this Rhineland area was to be permanently demilitarized, though under German sovereignty in other respects, Germany was not to keep any troops or make any fortifications within it. This might well be regarded as some security. In all her modern wars, Germany, as the aggressor, had managed to fight her campaigns outside her own frontiers. Thus, though France was ultimately the winner and Germany the loser in the war of 1914-18, it was French towns and villages that had been destroyed and French people rendered homeless while Germany retained her towns intact. If a Franco-German war were fought under the conditions laid down in this part of the treaty, the campaign would presumably be fought in the German demilitarized area. The danger was that, when the passions of war died down, other nations besides Germany, perhaps all nations except France, might feel it unreasonable that Germany should not be entitled to make what use she pleased of her own territory. In other words, Germany would send her armies into her own Rhineland provinces and public opinion outside France would feel that, after all, she was morally entitled to do so. That is exactly what happened in 1936.

The other security offered to France was a joint Anglo-American undertaking to come to her immediate assistance if attacked by Germany. Unfortunately this security vanished when America rejected the whole treaty, for the British undertaking, being a joint guarantee with America, lapsed at the same time.

*Disarmament.* It remained to be seen whether any security for France could be got by way of disarmament. Wilson's ideal, shared by many in Britain, was that ultimately there should be disarmament all round, but general disarmament was clearly a matter for consideration at some future date. It was one of the



tasks to be entrusted to the League of Nations. At present it must suffice to disarm Germany. Conscription in Germany was to be abolished, and the German army reduced to 100,000 men, the German navy was to be limited to six battleships and certain minor craft, there were to be no submarines and no air force. Allied authorities supervised the carrying out of these measures.

So long as Germany was disarmed France would certainly enjoy security. The 'post war period' in the proper sense of the term is the period during which Germany continued to be disarmed and France to dominate western Europe. But it could not go on for ever. (It lasted, as a matter of fact, till about 1933.) Either general disarmament would follow, as was vaguely promised in the treaty, or Germany would rearm. When the time came France refused the former course, and Germany adopted the latter. So ensued what should be called the 'pre-war period' to the war which began in 1939.

Why did France block all genuine schemes for disarmament? The answer, reduced to the simplest terms, is that there were only forty million Frenchmen and seventy million Germans. When France and Germany are placed on an equality France, unless absolutely certain of immediate and overwhelming support, is at the mercy of Germany.

*Reparations* There remains the question of reparations, or the extraction of payment from Germany. Here there were two motives at work, the desire to punish Germany, who in spite of her defeat had suffered no devastation of her own territory, and the desire to secure German contributions towards the payment of at any rate some part of the gigantic cost of the war which Germany and her Austrian ally had caused. The Germans had imposed on France in 1871 a fine or 'indemnity' (payment of damages) which, though small in comparison with the figures of 1919—£200,000,000—and paid with remarkable ease, had covered practically the whole of the German expenses in that war. Why should not the Allies of 1919 do the same?

The correspondence with Germany preceding the armistice had specified quite clearly that the Allies would demand payment for all damage done to the *civilian* population of the Allied countries by bombardment of towns or sinking of merchant shipping. Experts estimated the sum required to meet this

demand at about £3,000,000,000 Annual interest on that sum at five per cent would be £150,000,000, and this alone was certainly as much, or more than as much, as Germany could possibly pay, year by year. But Lloyd George and his British colleagues, entirely forgetting this promise as it seems, had said that as far as possible they would make Germany pay the whole cost of the war; such was the madness of those times. In the terms of the treaty they added further claims to those specified before the armistice, and though no total figure was stated in the treaty it is probable that the demand amounted to some such absurd figure as £8,000,000,000.

This was a grave error, for it enabled the Germans to say, with a good deal of truth, that the Allies had broken their pledged word. The war, it was said, and said not only in Germany, began with the tearing up of one scrap of paper and ended with the tearing up of another. In fact, the reparations clauses are the one entirely indefensible part of the peace treaties. At the same time it is to be remembered that reparations were never actually paid on anything like the scale demanded, that they were scaled down to a very moderate figure by agreement with Germany in 1924 and abolished entirely in 1932, before Hitler got control of Germany and began to organize his country for the forcible overthrow of the Versailles settlement. It is also to be remembered that, though America refused to take any share of the reparations from Germany, she also refused to cancel the debts for war material due to herself from the European Allies. So long as the European Allies had to pay a vast debt (nearly £1,000,000,000 in the case of Britain) to their own former partner, so much richer and less injured by the war than themselves, they could hardly be expected to abandon hope of extracting payment from their defeated enemy.

Such in outline were the peace treaties. It is easier to say that they failed than to say what better things could have been done in the conditions of war weariness and international hatred that inevitably prevailed in 1919.

*Status of the Dominions* The peace conference marked a big advance in the status of the self governing Dominions of the British Empire. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were represented there by their own prime ministers, who

signed the treaties as representatives of their own nations. Subsequently these Dominions, and also India and the Irish Free State, were accepted as members of the League of Nations. In fact the Dominions claimed and secured the status afterwards defined at the Imperial Conference of 1926. 'The group of self-governing communities composed of Great Britain and the British Dominions are,' says this definition, 'equal in status, and in no way subordinate one to another in any respect of their domestic or external affairs.'

## XI

### *Post-War*

#### I THE TROUBLES OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT, 1919-22

THE YEARS immediately after the war brought trouble to every country in Europe, and Britain had her share of them. The world was 'out of joint' after the tremendous dislocations of the war. In the victorious countries people expected the peace to bring a better world, and they were very impatient if they did not get it. Lloyd George had promised in his election speeches 'a land fit for heroes to live in'. The heroes came home, and found the promise unfulfilled.

*The post-war boom.* But the trouble most confidently expected did not arise—at first. It was expected that the demobilization of four million men from the fighting services would involve unprecedented unemployment. But the four million were absorbed into industry almost as quickly as they were demobilized, from the summer of 1919 till well on in 1920 there was hardly any unemployment. In fact the war was immediately followed by two years of booming trade. Every one had to buy all the things they had postponed buying during the war. Soldiers and sailors who had married during the war, now demobilized and supplied with the gratuities paid on demobilization, had to set up house. Continental countries with land and industries wrecked by bombardment had to buy abnormally large quantities of British goods, especially coal.

*Strikes.* But though there was hardly any unemployment there was much dissatisfaction and strikes on a scale never seen before. It seems incredible, but in 1919 there were on an average a hundred thousand British workers on strike on each day of the whole year. There were many reasons for this. Prices, which had risen during the war, continued to rise till they were nearly three times the prices of 1914, wages rose, but not always in proportion to prices. Anyhow, men back in the monotonous

daily round of industry after years of war service were restless, they wanted not merely what they had had before the war but something better, better pay, shorter hours, and some kind of control over the industries they worked in. Some imagined that a kind of workers' paradise had been established in Russia and might be established here. Much was said and written about 'the democratization of industry'. The government of the state was controlled by the votes of the whole nation. Why should not each industry be controlled by the majority of its workers? Mr Justice Sankey, appointed chairman of a commission to investigate the claims of the miners, declared in his Report that 'the present system of ownership stands condemned' and advocated the application of some kind of socialism to this vast industry. Lloyd George had given a vague and rash promise that he would carry out the recommendations of the commission, but he could not possibly carry this recommendation through a House of Commons consisting predominantly of wealthy Conservative business men.

It is impossible and unnecessary to describe or even mention the majority of the strikes of this period. There was a nine days' railway strike in September 1919, paralysing the whole transport system of the country, but proving at the same time that motor transport could, even at that date, go a long way towards filling the gap created by the stoppage of the railways. There was a coal strike in the following year, although at the time the mining industry was enjoying exceptional prosperity. There was even a police strike in Liverpool, where more than half the police came out on strike without notice. Rioting and looting followed and soldiers were called in to restore order. This could not be tolerated, and the police strikers were dismissed from the service and forfeited their pensions.

*The slump* With 1921 came the inevitable 'slump', or decline of trade. The post war spending was over, and every one began to feel hard up. Unemployment rose from almost nothing to 2,000,000 and the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1920, extending the Act of 1911 to practically all industries, came only just in time to cope with the situation. Prices fell and wages had to be reduced. The coal miners went on strike again, in March 1921, and called upon the railwaymen and other transport workers to strike at the same time, in support of them. This was the plan of

the triple alliance, arranged between the trade unions of these great industries a year before the outbreak of the war. But at the last minute the railwaymen, under the prudent leadership of J. H. Thomas—'traitor Thomas' as many of the miners called him—refused. The miners fought on alone and were defeated.

*The Council of Action.* At times the trade union leaders showed signs of attempting to dictate the policy of the government on matters unconnected with industry. The membership of the trade unions, two and a half million in 1910, four million in 1914, had risen to eight million<sup>1</sup> in 1920, and the Trades Union Congress came to think of itself as a kind of rival parliament, with a right to enforce its views on all sorts of subjects. At this date the government was engaged in supplying munitions to Poland for her war against Russia and in trying to suppress by force the republican rebellion in Ireland. The Trades Union Congress disapproved of both these policies and appointed what was called a Council of Action to threaten the government. Nothing came of this, but it illustrates the rebellious spirit of the times.

*Housing.* The most important achievement of the government in pursuit of its policy to make Britain a land 'fit for heroes to live in' was its housing policy. It was impossible at this time for private enterprise to build working-class houses at a price that would enable wage-earners either to rent or buy them. So the government launched a scheme of assisted housing, subsidized partly by the state and partly from 'the rates', i.e. the money raised by local government councils, hence the 'council houses' to be found on the outskirts of every British town.

*The Geddes axe.* But the housing scheme was expensive, and so it seemed was everything else. Even war expenditure did not entirely cease with the end of the war. Income tax, which had gone up to six shillings in the pound during the war, remained at that figure,<sup>2</sup> and even so the government ran heavily into debt year after year and the national debt, increased from about £800,000,000 to over £7,000,000,000 by the war, continued to increase. 'Anti-waste' became the watchword of the income tax

<sup>1</sup> It has since fallen to about five millions.

<sup>2</sup> It never at any time in the inter-war period fell below four shillings.

paying classes, and in 1922 Lloyd George appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Eric Geddes, one of the big business men whom he had brought into his government, to make recommendations for cutting down expenditure 'with an axe'.<sup>1</sup> These economies, which fell partly on the army, navy, and air force, and partly on the social services which were to build up a new and better world, were the last achievement of Lloyd George's government in domestic affairs.

But the troubles of these years were not confined to home affairs. Ireland, India, Egypt, were all in rebellion against their pre-war subordination to British control.

*Ireland during the war* We left Ireland in July 1914 on the verge of civil war. When the great war supervened the Home Rule bill was put in cold storage 'for the duration' and Redmond, the Irish Nationalist leader, offered Britain the whole-hearted co-operation of his followers in the war against Germany. But, as has already been shown, his followers no longer included all the Catholic Irish. A section of the southern Irish Volunteers repudiated Redmond's policy and associated themselves with the group of extremists who called themselves *Sinn Féin* (ourselves alone), a hitherto obscure society mainly concerned with the revival of the old Irish Gaelic language, but henceforth, the rallying point of the movement to secure Irish independence, if possible with the aid of Germany. They had an agent in Germany, Sir Roger Casement, a strange eccentric man who had been knighted for his distinguished career in the British consular service. Casement was landed from a German submarine on the west coast of Ireland in April 1916, and immediately arrested, which seems to have precipitated the sudden insurrection in Dublin known as the Easter week rebellion. It was suppressed after murderous street warfare involving the deaths of 450 people. Fifteen of its leaders, mostly young men, were executed and several hundred of the rebels interned in Wales.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hence the phrase 'to be axed', meaning to be dismissed from a job, not for inefficiency but because one's employers were making economies. Is the phrase still in use?

<sup>2</sup> One prominent leader was not executed, because he was by birth an American citizen, and the British government did not want to do anything that might annoy America. This man was De Valera, afterwards President of the Irish Free State.

There is little doubt that the rebellion was, on the whole, unpopular in southern Ireland, but in the course of the next two years the British government, pre-occupied with the great war, handled Irish affairs very unwisely in many ways, and simply played into the hands of the rebel movement. In 1918, for example, they introduced a bill, never enforced, for applying conscription to Ireland. This was, from the Irish standpoint, the last straw, and in the general election of December 1918 *Sinn Féin* secured 73 out of the 86 seats held by the old Nationalist party. These M.P.s refused to attend the British parliament for they held that Ireland, like Czechoslovakia and the rest of the new continental states, was already an independent republic. They met instead in their own *Dail Eireann* at Dublin.

*Post war Ireland* Thus Britain, after playing a leading part in defeating the greatest military power that the world had ever seen, found herself confronted by a minute adversary within her own British Isles, for the whole population of what is now the Free State (about 3,000,000) was less than that of the British armed forces in the last years of the war. But victory does not always go to the big battalions, it often goes to the strongest will. The Irish knew what they wanted, the British did not. Asquith and the Labour leaders held that Ireland, apart from Northern Ireland, should at once be offered 'Dominion status', a complete self government within the empire like that enjoyed by Canada, but the Lloyd George government refused. The opportunity was missed.

There followed a deplorable 'war' of ambushes and murders between the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) and the R.I.C. (Royal Irish Constabulary), a splendid force, wholly recruited in Ireland hitherto but now reinforced by volunteer units consisting of demobilized British officers and N.C.O.s and nicknamed, from their uniform, the Black and Tans. *Sinn Féin* offered rewards of £60 payable to murderers of members of the R.I.C. Eighteen were murdered in 1919 and 176 in 1920. The Black and Tans responded with 'reprisals'. Lloyd George declared that he 'had the murder gang on the run'.

Meanwhile the British government in 1920 enacted yet another Home Rule bill, superseding the 'cold storage' bill. It created two Home Rule units, one for Northern Ireland (the six



counties) and one of the rest of Ireland. Northern Ireland accepted the arrangement, and thus was created the system which has prevailed there down to the present day. Sir James Craig (Lord Craigavon) became prime minister of Northern Ireland and held the post till his death in 1940, by which time he had become the 'senior' premier of the whole world. In June 1921 the King, in a speech at Belfast opening the new parliament, spoke words of conciliation addressed to the rest of Ireland, and they met with a welcome response. An armistice was arranged and five leaders of the rebellion (De Valera not among them) came to London to discuss peace terms with the British government.

*The Irish Free State* The result was the treaty of December 1921, establishing what many in Britain had recommended two or three years before, an Irish Free State within the British empire, enjoying the same powers as the Dominion of Canada. The Irish negotiators accepted the result with reluctance, and when they returned to Ireland De Valera repudiated the terms.

There followed in 1923 an Irish civil war, between the 'Treatyites' and the republicans, far more destructive of life and property than the Anglo-Irish 'sema war' of 1919-21. But the 'Treatyites' found a good leader in Cosgrave. De Valera abandoned the struggle in 1924 and Cosgrave made an excellent president, loyal to his engagements towards Britain, for the next eight years. In 1932 he was defeated in a general election by De Valera's party, and from that date onwards until the time of writing (1941) De Valera has ruled Ireland. He pursued in various ways what Lord Salisbury used to call a 'policy of pin pricks' towards Britain, and Britain replied with further concessions. The most unwise of our concessions was the surrender, in 1938, of our right, retained under the treaty of 1921, to the use for naval purposes of certain harbours on the west coast of Ireland. Had we retained these bases we should have saved many of the ships sunk by German U-boats in the second great war.

*India* The opening of the first great war was greeted by remarkably widespread expressions of loyalty for the Allied cause in India. Not only the princes of the Indian states and the warlike peoples whose young men traditionally seek service in

the British Indian army but political reformers such as Gandhi himself declared themselves in favour of giving full support to the war, and indeed the campaigns in Mesopotamia, Palestine, and East Africa could hardly have been conducted without the help of Indian troops and the products of Indian industry. None the less, as the war lengthened, the desire for some advance towards freedom manifested itself, and the British government decided to meet the Indian demand as soon as possible without waiting for the end of the war.

In 1917 Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, made his historic declaration in the House of Commons, promising 'the greatest possible development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'. In other words, India was promised that by a series of steps, but not all at once, she should advance to the kind of self government enjoyed by the British dominions inhabited by European colonists. Montagu then visited India, and produced in collaboration with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, a detailed plan of semi-self government known as the Montagu Chelmsford report. This became the basis of the Government of India Act, 1919.

*Amritsar* But before that date unhappy events had occurred in India. Unrest and political crime had increased, and a committee of five, two of whom were Indians, were appointed to report of methods of dealing with the situation. The committee (called the Rowlatt committee from the name of its chairman, a British judge) reported in due course, and its recommendations were embodied in what was popularly called the Rowlatt Act. It seemed to British people reasonable enough, being simply designed to suppress the activities of political criminals, but for some mysterious reason it led Gandhi, the most influential spokesman of the Hindus who constitute three-quarters of the population of India, to put the weight of his immense prestige as India's most famous holy man into the scales against British rule. Formidable riots followed in many parts of India, and at Amritsar, in the Panjab, where several British subjects had been murdered, General Dyer undertook to restore order by firing on an Indian mob and killing 379 persons. There will probably always be a difference of opinion as to whether Dyer's action was

justified. Some think that he saved the province from much worse disorders, others, British as well as Indian, regard his action as brutal and unnecessary. But there is no doubt that the month of April 1919, when it occurred, was the most alarming month for British residents in India since the Mutiny of 1857.

*Future prospects* These events gave the new Indian constitution a bad start. None the less it worked better than many expected, and in 1935, in fulfilment of the Montagu pledge, a second and further advance towards Indian self-government was made by means of an India Act carried through the House of Commons by Sir Samuel Hoare. The difficulties in the way of complete Indian self-government are many and obvious. The cleavage between the Hindus and the minority of 90,000,000 Mohammedans is as deep and as real as that between rival nationalities in Europe, and Mohammedan communities are scattered over all parts of the country. They will not submit to government controlled and exercised by the Hindu majority. And there is the army question. At present India is defended by a British-Indian army largely staffed, and in its upper ranks almost entirely staffed, by British officers. A partly British army could not be subordinate to a purely Indian government. Even if the British element in the army could in course of time be entirely eliminated, the problem would not be solved, for the Indian army is almost entirely recruited from certain 'warlike' provinces such as the Panjab, whereas the political leaders of the Hindu Congress party mostly come from provinces which make practically no contribution to the army, and it is doubtful if a predominantly Panjabi army would be an obedient servant of predominantly Bengali politicians. These and other difficulties may in course of time be overcome, but it is no use pretending they are not there, as many enthusiasts for Indian progress, both British and Indian, are at times apt to do.

*Egypt* Egypt had made remarkable progress in material welfare since the British took control of it in 1882. Lord Cromer, it is said, gave Egypt water and justice. 'Justice' speaks for itself, and 'water' refers to the scientific irrigation of the Egyptian plain by Nile water, which more than doubled the productivity of the country. But our rule was never very popular and our unpopularity was much increased by the use we made of Egypt

during the war. It was a convenient base for campaigns against Turkey. Egyptian peasants were more or less forcibly enrolled for service in labour corps, and many of those not so enrolled were forced to part with their carts and animals for which they were perhaps inadequately paid.

As soon as the armistice was signed Zaghul Pasha, who played the same sort of part as De Valera in Ireland and Gandhi in India, demanded complete independence for his country. When no notice was taken of this demand riots and strikes broke out. A commission of inquiry was sent out under Milner, who early in his career had served in Egypt under Cromer, and their report recommended a treaty of alliance between Britain and Egypt in which Britain would recognize the independence of Egypt and Egypt would confer on Britain powers to safeguard her special interests in the country, including the right to maintain a British force on Egyptian soil. After irritating delays this policy was adopted in 1922. Certain disputed points were left unsettled, and on some occasions since 1922 there has been acute ill feeling between Britain and Egypt owing to the activities of Zaghul Pasha's party, called the Wafd, which resents the privileged position still retained by Britain in their country. But on the whole, and more particularly after Egypt became aware of Mussolini's ambitious designs for a Mediterranean empire, the arrangement has worked well for both countries.

Various problems of post-war Europe continued to vex the government. The problem of France, Germany, and reparations will be dealt with in the next section. Here we must consider the problem of Greece and Turkey, which came to a head within the lifetime of the Lloyd George government.

*The Chanak crisis* The peace treaty dictated by the victorious Allies to Turkey was called, with unconscious appropriateness, the Treaty of Sèvres—for Sèvres is chiefly famous for the manufacture of fine porcelain, a very breakable commodity, and the treaty of Sèvres proved very brittle also. In the nineteenth century Turkey was often spoken of as 'the sick man of Europe', a phrase coined by the Tsar Nicholas I before the Crimean war. Turkey in Europe was indeed sick, and had, to all intents and purposes, died, but the new Turkish republic, consisting of the genuinely Turkish area of Anatolia, with its new capital at

Ankara, and its new leader, the ruthless Mustapha Kemal, afterwards surnamed Ataturk, was a very vigorous organization. The treaty had allotted the western part of Anatolia to the Greeks, who had landed at Smyrna in 1919 and advanced far beyond the frontier staked out for them by the Allies. Kemal bided his time while Greece exhausted herself with maintaining an army in the middle of a mountainous and hostile country. At last, in August 1922 he pounced. The Greeks were routed, and not only the Greek armies but ultimately the whole Greek population in Anatolia, half a million in number, were either killed or driven out of the country.

This tragedy did not in itself directly concern us. But small Allied forces, British, French, and Italian, still occupied both sides of the historic straits, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, for the treaty of Sèvres had arranged that these straits and the city of Constantinople should be placed under international control. If the victorious Turks attacked and overwhelmed these small forces and broke through into Europe, Russia would probably have attacked Rumania and yet another war might have raged throughout the Balkan countries. The French and Italian forces were withdrawn before the oncoming storm. The British, under General Harington, remained behind their defences at Chanak on the east side of the Dardanelles (October 1922). It was a brave policy, and justified by the result, for the Turks refrained from attacking them. An armistice was arranged, followed by a peace conference at Lausanne. Turkey secured not only all Anatolia but full sovereignty over the straits and Constantinople.

*The fall of Lloyd George* The Chanak crisis was immediately followed by the downfall of Lloyd George. For some time past the Conservatives, who made up the majority of the supporters of the government, had been restive. If Lloyd George had been as successful in dealing with post war problems as he had been in directing British energies during the war, it is very likely that his coalition would have become a permanency and emerged as a new, or National, party. But he had not been successful and the Conservatives wanted to be rid of him. At a meeting of the Conservative members of the Coalition in October 1922, Stanley Baldwin moved a resolution that the Conservative party should

fight the next election 'with its own leader and its own programme' It was carried by a majority of more than two to one. Lloyd George at once resigned. The King sent for Bonar Law, who became prime minister and dissolved parliament.

*The 1922 election* In the election which followed, Bonar Law's policy could be summed up in one word—'Tranquillity.' It was felt, perhaps unfairly, that the unending series of crises of the four years since the war ended had been somehow due to Lloyd George, what every one wanted was to get back to real peacetime conditions. Just as the Liberals in 1906 had dropped Home Rule from their programme to make sure of defeating Tariff Reform, so Bonar Law in 1922 dropped Tariff Reform to make sure of defeating Lloyd George. He succeeded. The Conservatives secured a majority over all other parties combined, 344 seats out of 615. The Labour party more than doubled its numbers and rose to 142. The 117 Liberals were almost equally divided between the followers of Asquith and the followers of Lloyd George, and these had no love for each other. It is worth remarking that if the pre-war Irish Nationalist party had still been in the House of Commons, the various oppositions taken together would have balanced the Conservative vote, and the result would have been political chaos. The creation of the Irish Free State has been as great a boon to British politics as to Catholic Ireland.

The downfalls of Asquith and Lloyd George have this in common, that both were overthrown by dissatisfaction arising within the ranks of their own followers, and both fell never to rise again. Lloyd George had held Cabinet office continuously for seventeen years, an experience unparalleled since the Reform Bill of 1832.

## II LABOUR IN OFFICE—AND ON STRIKE, 1922-9

*The American Debt* The first important duty confronting the new government was the settlement of terms of payment of the British war debt to America. Baldwin, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, went to Washington for this purpose, but he could not secure very generous terms. We were to pay America £30,000,000 annually for the next ten years and afterwards

£40,000,000 annually—till 1935<sup>1</sup> At the same time the other inter-allied debt payments were settled. Our continental debtors, excluding Russia who had repudiated all her debts, owed us together rather more than we owed America, but we settled with them on terms which excused them the greater part of their debts<sup>1</sup> The most we hoped was to get from our Ally debtors and from German reparations taken together enough to cover our payments to America The British government had declared, in a document called, from its author, the Balfour Note, that they would prefer that all inter-allied debts and reparations should be cancelled, but America would not take this view.

*Labour in office* Bonar Law's health was already failing when he took office and he retired in six months, being succeeded as prime minister by Baldwin One interesting feature of the Baldwin appointment was that Curzon, very much his senior in political experience and foreign secretary for the four previous years, was passed over, very largely because it was now felt to be unsuitable that the prime minister should be in the House of Lords Baldwin felt that it was impossible to restore industrial prosperity—there were about 2,000,000 unemployed—unless he was free to introduce a protectionist tariff taxing foreign manufactured goods He therefore dissolved parliament rather suddenly in the autumn of 1923 and 'went to the country', as the phrase is, with a programme of tariff reform or protection. Neither his party nor the country was prepared for this, and though the Conservatives remained the largest party, with 257 seats, they could be defeated by a combination of Labour (192) and the Liberals (157) When the new parliament met in January 1924 these parties combined to defeat the government and Labour, as the larger of them, took office for the first time in its history

We have already traced the history of the Labour party down to the outbreak of the war When the war came the party divided, the majority, consisting mostly of trade union officials, supported the war and some of their leaders held office in the coalition governments, Clynes, for example, being very successful as

<sup>1</sup> To be exact, America excused us 28 per cent of our debt to her; we excused France 62 per cent and Italy 86 per cent, this is assuming in each case an interest rate of 4½ per cent which was the original demand of America on us

Minister of Food, the minority, the socialist 'intellectuals' as they were called, under the leadership of Ramsay MacDonald, opposed the war. Since then the party had reunited and MacDonald had been re-elected its leader. Labour had come to the fore and got ahead of their Liberal rivals much sooner than any one would have expected in 1914. There were two reasons for this, one was that the Liberal party was handicapped by the bitter feud between the followers of Asquith and of Lloyd George, the other was that post-war conditions favoured them. Those who wanted drastic change and a new and better world—and there were many such—felt that a new party was more likely to give it them than an old party like the Liberals who were supposed to be, like the Conservatives, hampered by 'Victorian' traditions.



industrial district in Germany. The German government gave way and payments began, but in order to make payments in cash Germany had to sell her own marks to buy the currency of the Allied countries. As a result the mark, already depreciated, sharply declined in value. Consequently it took more and more German money to meet the Allied demands month by month. By the end of 1922 the Germans were in arrears with their payments, and the French proceeded to occupy the Ruhr valley. Bonar Law, now prime minister of Britain, disapproved and took no part in the occupation.

The German reply to the occupation of the Ruhr was to organize a general strike of the workers in that district. This was intended to secure that France should reap no profit from her venture, and it may have succeeded, but it also meant ruin for Germany, for her finances could not afford the continuous drain of money to support the strikers. Then occurred (1923) the 'flight from the mark'. The value of paper money at all times depends on credit, and credit is after all just another name for faith. The Germans lost faith in their own money. What had originally cost one mark (a shilling) came to cost ten marks, a hundred marks, a thousand marks, and finally marks would not buy it at all. It is important to realize what this meant. For thousands of German families it was a disaster second only to the war. Every one who had savings invested in German institutions had those savings simply wiped out of existence. Houses, land, furniture, machinery, no doubt survived and were as good as before, but 'money'—which is simply credit—had disappeared.

*The Dawes Plan* The situation was retrieved by the emergence of a new German statesman, Stresemann, who realized that as a first step to recovery Germany must come to terms with her enemies. He terminated the Ruhr strikes, and offered to negotiate a new reparations agreement. France was still obdurate, but Britain and America came to his aid. They realized that the world as a whole could never recover prosperity unless there was a prosperous Germany once more. Britain proposed and America accepted the idea of a new committee on reparations which should approach the whole subject as a plain matter of business, and begin by finding out what in fact Germany *could* pay. This committee goes by the name of the Dawes Committee, its

round of politics, discussing such subjects as classical literature or the good old days in his beloved Worcestershire. In politics he was above all interested in the relations of rich and poor and his chief aim was to improve them. Foreign affairs he seems to have regarded as a necessary evil, he was a very typical Englishman and probably felt all kinds of foreigners to be uncomfortably 'foreign'. In domestic affairs he made the Conservative philosophy more interesting and more attractive than any statesmen since Disraeli.

*Locarno* It will be best to continue first the story of British, French, and German relations after MacDonald's London Conference, accepting the Dawes Plan. What was now wanted was a political settlement such as would give France a sense of security. This was found in the Locarno Treaties of 1925. By the first and main treaty France, Belgium, and Germany agreed that they would respect for ever the frontier between them, and Britain and Italy undertook to guarantee the settlement, i.e. if either Germany or France (or Belgium) attacked the frontier, Britain and Italy would immediately join forces with the party attacked. The merit of the treaty, as compared with the treaty of Versailles was that there was no element of *Diktat* about it, indeed the idea of it was Stresemann's. It also had the merit of breaking down the old division into victors and vanquished. In the unlikely event of France making an unprovoked attack on Germany, Germany could call on British and Italian support.

There was a second treaty, commonly called the 'eastern Locarno treaty'. By this Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia undertook not to seek to alter the existing frontier by methods of war, and France guaranteed the arrangement. It will be noticed that the eastern treaty was a weaker document than the western one. In the east Germany refused to regard her present frontier as permanent, she only undertook to refrain from attacking it by force, and only one great power guaranteed the treaty. Thus France was and Britain was not, at any time, pledged to defend Czechoslovakia. None the less it was obvious that an eastern quarrel might well involve a western war—as it had done in 1914 and was to do again in 1939.

As a result of the Locarno treaties the Allies evacuated one of the three zones of the Rhineland and Germany was admitted to

American chairman being General Dawes. It issued its report in April 1924. The main idea was the establishment in Germany of a permanent Transfer Committee with an American chairman. This committee was to fix year by year how much Germany could pay, to receive payment in the re-established German currency, and to be responsible for the tricky business of its conversion into the currencies of the creditor countries. To get the new system started America was to make Germany a loan of £40,000,000.

It remained for the governments concerned to accept this plan, and very fortunately a general election had just occurred in France, which gave a majority to the parties favouring it. A conference was held in London, presided over by Ramsay MacDonald. The Dawes Plan was accepted by all concerned, and it really looked as if the troubles consequent on the first great war might be over at last.

It was a triumph for MacDonald, but a few months later he undertook to make a treaty with Russia which was regarded as unwise by both Liberals and Conservatives. They combined to defeat him, and he dissolved parliament, the third dissolution in a period of two years.

*Baldwin premier again.* The general election of October 1924 rather resembled that of 1895. Once again the electorate expressed disapproval of a weak government which had been dependent on the votes of a third party. It returned 413 Conservatives who thus had a majority of two hundred over both the other parties combined. Baldwin again became prime minister and retained the position for the next five years.

The Conservative government of 1924-9 was in many respects a strong one. Austen Chamberlain, elder son of the Victorian statesman, was Foreign Secretary and Churchill, who had held various offices in the Lloyd George coalition, returned to the Conservative party as Chancellor of the Exchequer, but the outstanding figure was the prime minister himself. Stanley Baldwin was a wealthy business man but he no more corresponded to the popular idea of a wealthy business man than MacDonald to the popular idea of a British workman. He was a cousin of Rudyard Kipling and a nephew of the painter Burne-Jones, and he excelled in speeches on subjects outside the narrow

round of politics, discussing such subjects as classical literature or the good old days in his beloved Worcestershire. In politics he was above all interested in the relations of rich and poor and his chief aim was to improve them. Foreign affairs he seems to have regarded as a necessary evil, he was a very typical Englishman and probably felt all kinds of foreigners to be uncomfortably 'foreign'. In domestic affairs he made the Conservative philosophy more interesting and more attractive than any statesmen since Disraeli.

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There was a second treaty, commonly called the 'eastern Locarno treaty'. By this Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia undertook not to seek to alter the existing frontier by methods of war, and France guaranteed the arrangement. It will be noticed that the eastern treaty was a weaker document than the western one. In the east Germany refused to regard her present frontier as permanent, she only undertook to refrain from attacking it by force, and only one great power guaranteed the treaty. Thus France was and Britain was not, at any time, pledged to defend Czechoslovakia. None the less it was obvious that an eastern quarrel might well involve a western war—as it had done in 1914 and was to do again in 1939.

As a result of the Locarno treaties the Allies evacuated one of the three zones of the Rhineland and Germany was admitted to

the League of Nations and became, as a 'great power', a permanent member of the Council. It was a time of optimism, and the next few years 1926-9 were the quietest and happiest part of the period between the two great wars. Britain, France, and Germany were held together by three statesmen who liked and trusted each other and strove for the mutual goodwill of their respective countries—Austen Chamberlain, Stresemann, and the Frenchman Briand. Economically it was a period of recovery from the post-war slump, and most of all in Germany. German revival was regarded as a good field for foreign investment. Money poured in—£750,000,000, one third of which came from the United States. Most of it was spent on industrial reconstruction. Part of it was paid out in reparations to European claimants, who passed it on in payment of their debts to America. Thus money made a circle from America to Germany, on to France or Britain, and back to America—though what came from America was still on loan and requiring repayment some day, as Germany would discover in due course.

*The coal industry and the general strike* It is curious and unfortunate that one man's poison should be another man's meat. The French occupation of the Ruhr and the strike of the German Ruhr miners had brought back prosperity to the British miners in 1923. Similarly the restoration of happier conditions on the continent and the restarting of the Ruhr industries plunged British coal mining into depression again. It was an industry in which ill-feeling between owners and employees was unhappily a deeply rooted tradition. Ever since socialism had begun to be widely discussed in Britain the miners had been prominent among those who demanded the overthrow of the capitalist system. They demanded the nationalization of the mining industry, partly because they considered that only when the whole industry was unified, instead of being divided among a lot of separate colliery companies, could it be efficiently run, partly, too, because they thought that, under nationalization, their wages would be guaranteed at a reasonable rate and if necessary subsidized at the expense of the taxpayer.

The leading spirit among the miners was a Welshman, A. J. Cook, who for the past fifteen years had advocated revolution by means of a general strike of all the industries on which the

day to day life of the country depended. Such a strike would, he held, compel the government to grant the demands of the workers. He no more believed in parliamentary democracy than did Lenin or Mussolini. He believed that the only class that mattered was his own, the proletariat as it is called in the communist language, and that the only way to secure justice was through some form of revolution. Cook was now a member of the Trades Union Council (the 'cabinet' of the Trades Union Congress), which was in a position to issue strike orders to all the principal industries of the country, and he skilfully persuaded his colleagues on the T.U.C. to back the miners' demands when the crisis came.

In June 1925 the mine-owners gave notice that, on account of the fall both in the quantity and the price of coal sold for export, wages would be drastically reduced at the end of July. The miners refused to work at the new rates of pay and the T.U.C. showed every intention of supporting them by calling out the railwaymen and transport workers.

To avert a crisis Baldwin offered to appoint a Royal Commission to make a thorough examination of all the problems of the industry. He went further and offered, during the nine months needed for the inquiry, to subsidize the coal industry at the taxpayers' expense. The owners were to pay the new wages and the miners to receive the old ones, the difference, amounting to £24,000,000, being paid by the state.

The Samuel commission (its chairman being Sir Herbert Samuel, a Liberal politician) produced a detailed report recommending many changes in the organization of the industry but acknowledging that some reduction of wages (though less than the owners demanded) was necessary unless the miners were prepared to add an hour to their shifts and go back to the pre-war eight hours day. Neither party accepted the report. The owners disliked most of the proposed reorganization and the miners stood by Cook's slogan—'not a cent off the pay, not a minute on the day'. The miners stopped work on May 1, 1926, and after some last-minute hesitations the T.U.C. ordered a strike of all railwaymen, transport workers, and printers to begin on May 4.

The so-called general strike lasted only nine days and proved a complete failure. The government refused to negotiate with

either the T U C or the miners till the general strike had been called off. They regarded it as an attack upon the fundamental principle of our democracy, the authority of a government supported by a parliamentary majority based on the votes of the whole nation. The attempt of the T U C, to deprive the public of its newspapers by means of the printers' strike tended to turn ordinary people against the strikers. In fact it proved more difficult to paralyse the community than the T.U.C. had supposed. The government issued a newspaper of its own called the *British Gazette*. The ordinary newspapers struggled back into existence after a few days, and there was also the wireless. Wireless telegraphy by 'dots and dashes' had played an important part in the first great war, but wireless telephony did not begin for practical purposes till 1920. Since then the habit of 'listening in' to broadcast talks and entertainments had been slowly growing. The general strike proved its value, and thereafter wireless sets became a more and more common feature of the ordinary household. As regards transport, motor traffic on the roads and volunteer work on the railways ensured a reasonable distribution of supplies, which became more efficient every day the strike continued.

So the general strike was called off—a complete failure. The miners remained on strike till far on in the autumn. Finally, by accepting the additional hour on the day's work, they secured in most districts the maintenance of their pre-strike wages.

The two strikes together had cost the country a lot of money, but on the whole they raised its prestige in the eyes of the world. Here was the British revolution, or an attempt at it, and everything was as calm and orderly as a Victorian Sunday morning—or nearly so. In some districts the general strikers occupied their leisure in playing football against the special constables who had been enrolled to keep them in order.

*1926 at home and abroad* These strikes mark the end of a stormy period in British industrial history. It began about 1911 with the big pre-war strikes, continued in a modified form through most of the first great war, and broke out again with increased violence almost immediately after the armistice. After 1926 conditions changed. Strikes were few and far between, revolutionary ideas were confined to small societies with little

influence, and friendlier relations developed between the different classes. It would probably be true to say that class consciousness declined. People thought less about the fact that they belonged to a particular class with interests at variance with those of some other class.

The year of the general strike was also the year in which Germany joined the League of Nations. The next few years were quiet and hopeful years both at home and abroad. It looked as if pacification in industry and pacification in international affairs might proceed side by side. Then came the Great Slump, from 1929 onwards. One would think this economic disease (for such it was) would be more likely to bring strife in industry than strife between nations. But it was not so. Peaceful conditions in British industry survived the great slump and continue to-day (1941), whereas abroad the slump led directly to the triumph of the Nazi movement in Germany and all that has followed from that.

*Miscellaneous items* Not much more need be said about other events of these years 1924-9. Though pledged not to introduce a general protective tariff the Baldwin government took some small steps in that direction by its Safeguarding of Industries bill. Under this bill any industry which could prove that it was subject to abnormal foreign competition could claim a protective duty, subject to the approval of parliament, and several specialized industries of moderate size, such as lace, gas-mantles, and cutlery, secured protection in this way. The government also enormously enlarged the scheme of old age pensions and introduced pensions for widows of all persons who came under the health insurance scheme. It also gave the vote to what were absurdly called 'flappers'—women over twenty-one and under thirty, thus completing, one supposes, the enfranchising process begun by the first Reform Bill in 1832. It may also be mentioned that 1927-9 were the only years in which payments received in reparations from Germany and in repayment of war debts from our continental allies balanced our own payments to America.

*The election of 1929.* A general election was inevitable in 1929, under the five years' limit of the Parliament Act, and it proved

<sup>1</sup> Absurdly, because a 'flapper' is really a Victorian maiden in her 'teens' with pig tail flapping against her shoulders.



perhaps the least exciting election in the twentieth century, although there were more voters, and also more candidates than ever before. Each of the three parties contested five-sixths of the seats. It was really the Liberal party's last fling. Lloyd George, once again in control of the whole party, announced a programme more socialistic than that of the nominally socialist Labour party, and put up 500 candidates. They won only 60 seats. As for the Conservatives, after five years in office the swing of the pendulum would naturally be against them, and perhaps Baldwin made a mistake in choosing the slogan 'Safety first' for his posters. 'Tranquillity' was a good cry in 1922 when the electorate had been unmercifully banged about for eight years, but a similar slogan in 1929 seemed a bit tame. Baldwin was in fact offering another five years of 'the mixture, as before'. As a result the Conservative seats fell from 396 to 260 and Labour rose from 160 to 290. For the first time the Labour party was the largest in the House of Commons, but it was still dependent on the Liberals for a majority. Baldwin resigned and MacDonald again became prime minister.

As it turned out, the Conservatives were lucky to lose and the Labour party unlucky to win the election of 1929.

### III THE GREAT SLUMP AND AFTER, 1929-37

*The Great Slump* A few months after the Labour government took office the great slump began to spread over the world. We have already used these words, boom and slump, but we must examine them more closely. A boom is a period in which society is full of optimism and confidence, so far as money is concerned. Customers are prepared to buy on a large scale: the makers of goods are prepared to produce on a large scale, because they feel confident of selling them, they build new factories, buy lots of raw materials, employ more workers, pay good wages. Unemployment decreases. Shareholders profit as the value of their shares goes up. Money is abundantly borrowed and lent at high rates of interest. Everybody's prosperity seems to contribute to everybody else's. Then comes a slump. Makers of goods have been too confident and have produced more than they can sell. Workers are dismissed. Unemployment increases. Speculators

who have bought stocks at excessively high prices become alarmed and want to sell. The farther the boom has gone the more violent the reaction will be. Bankruptcies abound. All confidence is lost. Then, after a number of lean years the demand of the buyer begins to revive, the producer takes heart again, and the cycle of boom and slump is repeated.

All through the nineteenth century booms and slumps had alternated. Some said it was the fault of the capitalist system, though whether any other system such as socialism would have done better is uncertain. During the war there had been, from the standpoint of industry, a tremendous boom, for governments were prepared to buy everything that could be produced for winning the war, from aeroplanes to soldiers' boots. Those who profited by the boom—in most cases they could not help doing so—were called 'war profiteers'. As we have seen, the boom continued for two years after the end of the war, in Britain at any rate, but was followed by a severe slump in 1921-3. There followed a boom period 1923-9, very marked in Germany and America but less so in Britain where unemployment fell from 2,000,000 to 1,000,000, but not lower.

Then in 1929 came the beginning of such a slump as the world had never seen before. To some it seemed as if our civilization, unable to recover after all from the blows dealt it by the first great war, had been smitten by some mysterious economic disease. The effects of the slump were most clearly seen in international trade. Between 1929 and 1933 the volume of the international trade of the world shrank till it was barely one-third of what it had been. Nothing like this had ever happened before. It was as much a record among slumps, as the war of 1914-18 had been a record among wars. In Britain unemployment rose from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000. In Germany it rose from almost nothing to 6,000,000, in America to something like 15,000,000. In Germany it produced the National Socialist revolution, in America the election of President Roosevelt and his 'New Deal' policy, by which government took control of industry to an extent never before dreamt of in that country, in Britain it produced the break up of the Labour government and the establishment of a 'National government'.

Before proceeding to this event, one may well ask what was

the cause of the great slump. Many answers were given. Some said it was due to mechanization, the production of more and more wonderful machines, which employed fewer and fewer men to turn out more and more goods. Others pointed to tariffs. Never before had the states of the world done so much to discourage international trade by taxing what competed with their own products. Others pointed to the 'chaos of currencies'. Before 1914 all the currencies (i.e. money) of the civilized world had fixed values measured in gold. Such and such a weight of gold was given everywhere for a pound, a dollar, a franc, and so on, and as all currencies were anchored to gold they were anchored to each other. An English buyer of American goods at a price stated in dollars knew exactly how much that would be in his own English money when the bill fell due for payment. But during the war every European currency had 'gone off gold', i.e. it had refused to give a fixed weight of gold in return for its money. Most remained off gold, and the few who, like Great Britain (in 1925) struggled back to a re-establishment of the old 'gold parity', often seemed to regret it.<sup>1</sup> So the lack of a stable international money proved a discouragement to trade. All these factors may have contributed to the slump of 1929 and made it worse, but they cannot be regarded as its cause; for they were all of them features of the whole period since 1918, they do not account for the alternation of boom, slump, boom, slump.

The cause must be sought in the peculiar circumstances of the years immediately preceding 1929. We have seen how, from the establishment of the Dawes Plan in 1924, Americans had been lending money to Germany—and to other European states scrambling upwards towards recovery. In 1928 American lending to Europe slackened off and money began to be recalled from Europe for the more exciting purpose of gambling in American share markets. For the United States was nearing the peak of the greatest boom of modern times—the 'Coolidge prosperity' as it was called, after the U.S.A. President of those years. It proved a veritable 'South Sea Bubble', on a scale a thousand times larger than that speculation mania of two hundred years ago.<sup>2</sup> Then in

<sup>1</sup> Great Britain returned to the gold standard at the time of Churchill's first budget, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> The 'South Sea Bubble' also came a few years after the end of a great war, the War of the Spanish Succession.

the autumn of 1929, after Americans had been buying and selling shares at more and more fantastic prices, the American world suddenly lost confidence. Perhaps these share certificates, 'scraps of paper', did not represent real wealth at all equivalent to what was paid for them. The bottom fell out of the market, as the saying is. Every one rushed to sell, and no one wanted to buy. Prices of shares fell to zero, and America hastened to recall all the money it could recall from Europe. Germany and other borrowers were in no position to find the money. Some of it had been used to pay reparations, most of the rest for 'capital expenditure', building new factories and the like, and was stuck fast in bricks and mortar.

In June 1931 the principal Austrian bank went bankrupt. This caused a further 'run on Germany', i.e. demands from Germany's creditors for repayment. By August the trouble had spread to England, when the Bank of England was in difficulties. 'Safe as the Bank of England' was a proverb. If the Bank of England was in trouble, where was safety to be found?

*The second Labour government* To return to the summer of 1929, when the Labour government took office. The oncoming of the slump would have embarrassed any government, but it was particularly embarrassing to a Labour government, for the main interest of a Labour government is to improve the standard of living of the working classes, and the easiest way to do this is to improve the quantity and quality of the services supplied by the state—education, payments to the unemployed, pensions, etc.—and to place the charge for these things on the shoulders of the rich by increasing income tax and super tax. But the amount of taxable income, and consequently the amount raised by taxation, was beginning to shrink in a most alarming manner. At the same time the number of the unemployed began to rise steadily from 1,000,000 till (in 1932) it was close on 3,000,000. This meant that the unemployment fund, the proceeds of the weekly insurance payments, went bankrupt and had to borrow heavily from the general fund raised by taxation.

It is unnecessary to describe the activities of this unfortunate Labour government. Almost everything it tried to do gave offence either to the Liberals on whose support it depended or to the rank and file of its own supporters. Its leading men,

MacDonald, Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Thomas, the railwaymen's leader who was given the formidable task of 'abolishing unemployment', were in a hopeless position. They had all grown cautious with advancing years and were 'conservative' in everything but name. They realized more and more that the programme they stood for could not be carried out in the conditions of 1929-31. In the summer of 1931 the report of a committee of inquiry into the financial position, called the May report from the name of its chairman, Sir George May, showed that the government was running the national exchequer into debt at the rate of more than £100,000,000 a year. It was the publication of this fact which led foreign depositors to start withdrawing their cash from the Bank of England. The stability of the Bank could only be restored by putting the national finances in order. If we went on as we were going the pound might suffer the fate which the German mark had suffered eight years before.

*The National Government* The only remedies were to increase taxation and diminish expenditure, and one necessary item in the reduction of expenditure, it was held, was a ten per cent 'cut' in the weekly payments to the unemployed. On this point the Labour government split, MacDonald, Snowden, and Thomas were for it and nearly all the rest against it. MacDonald resigned. The King might have sent for Baldwin to form a Conservative government. Instead, he asked MacDonald to form a National government containing the leading members of all three parties. The leading Conservatives and Liberals (with the exception of Lloyd George who was ill at the time but would have refused) consented to join him.

When the new government met the House of Commons with its drastic economy proposals it was supported by the whole of the Conservative party, nearly all the Liberal party, but only a handful of the Labour party, the bulk of MacDonald's former supporters being now in opposition. The new budget (1931 is the only peace time year that has had two budgets, one in the spring and another in the autumn) and the Economy bill, enacting cuts in all government salaries—cabinet ministers, civil servants, soldiers and sailors, teachers, policemen, postmen, etc.—and also in the allowances to the unemployed, were passed as quickly as

possible. But it was necessary to prove to the world that the country as a whole was behind the National government in these drastic and unpleasant measures. Parliament was dissolved in October and the general election gave the National government a majority even more decisive than that secured by Lloyd George's coalition in 1918. 558 Government candidates were elected and only 56 Labour and Lloyd Georgian opponents. The result surpassed expectations, but the reasons for it are plain. The Labour party was divided and three of its best-known leaders had, by their line of action, condemned it. More important perhaps, the country had had a bad fright. The ordinary man does not understand financial questions, but he realized that his 'money' had come within a measurable distance of going the way of the German mark, and he understood that a victory of the National government was the best way of protecting himself against this awful prospect.

*Protection* The chief new departure of the National government after the election was the adoption of a general protective tariff. In the first half of the nineteenth century Britain had abolished by degrees all her protective tariffs, retaining only such import duties as were imposed solely to raise revenue—on tobacco, tea, sugar, wines, etc. Under this free trade system Britain had flourished exceedingly so long as she was 'the workshop of the world'. Our imports had been mostly raw materials, and other countries took our finished articles in exchange. In 1903 Joseph Chamberlain had proposed a return to protection, but the country had rejected his proposals. Now in 1932 it fell to his younger son, Neville, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to introduce a tariff such as his father had advocated nearly thirty years before.

*The end of Reparations* Another result of the slump was the abolition of reparation payments by an international conference meeting at Lausanne in 1932.<sup>1</sup> Two years earlier, in 1930, the victors of the past war had withdrawn the whole of the remainder

<sup>1</sup> This was followed by a stoppage of payment of debts to America by Great Britain and most of the other debtors. America never abandoned her claim to these payments but she did not press it, for payments had become almost impossible. Only two states continued to pay their war debts to America, Finland and South Africa, and the sums involved in both cases were small.

of their forces from the Rhineland, though they were entitled by the treaty to keep some of them there till 1935. These two acts of generosity towards Germany might have helped to make peace permanent had they come a little earlier, but they were too late. Hitler was already rising to supreme power in Germany.

The great slump proved, in spite of its intensity, to be like other slumps. From 1933 onwards unemployment grew less, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer began to knock off some of the severest of the burdens imposed in 1931. But international trade never recovered before the outbreak of the second great war its 1929 figures.

However, as the financial prospects brightened the international outlook darkened, and the British government was confronted with a series of problems in foreign affairs—the Japanese attack on China, the Italian attack on Abyssinia, and finally the menace of Nazi Germany. Of these the first two fall within this chapter.

*Japan and China* We have recorded the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5. That war definitely gave Japan her position as one of the great powers of the world, and decided that Japan rather than Russia should have the privilege of empire building at the expense of northern China. In 1911 the Chinese revolution broke out. The semi-foreign Manchu dynasty, which had established its capital in Peking and ruled China for the previous two hundred years, was overthrown. The first president of the Chinese republic, Yuan-shih-kai failed to restore order, and China entered on a period of civil wars extending over the next eighteen years (1911–29). During this time the first great war enabled Japan to take over the German base of Kiao-Chow, and to secure extensive powers in northern China.

The Chinese civil wars were brought to an end by the gradual triumph of the Kuomintang party under Chiang kai shek. The leading idea of this movement was the expulsion of all foreigners, British or Russian or Japanese, from Chinese soil. Its triumph did not suit Japanese ambitions, and in 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria.

This was the first major outbreak of war since the end of the first great war, and enthusiasts for the League of Nations felt

<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Japanese alliance had been terminated in 1921.

that here was a test case for League action. Unfortunately Japan was unlikely to attend to any lectures from Geneva unless the lecture was backed by a serious threat of war from one of the great powers, and none of them felt inclined to go to war about the affairs of the Far East, especially as both the combatants were equally anti-European in their ambitions. Great Britain forbade the sale of munitions to either side, but this well-meant effort proved futile as no other country followed her example. As for the Japanese they went ahead and conquered Manchuria, renaming it the Empire of Manchukuo, with a descendant of the old Chinese Manchu line as a puppet emperor, and with that for five years they were content. In 1937 they picked another quarrel with the Chinese government and opened a war of conquest on a far more extensive scale. Peking, Nanking (the Kuomintang capital), Shanghai, Canton, Hankow, all fell into Japanese hands. Chiang-kai-shek's government withdrew its headquarters to Chungking, a thousand miles inland. But Chinese resistance still (1941) continues, and what the upshot of these events will be none can say.

*Italy and Abyssinia* During the 'scramble for Africa' at the end of the nineteenth century, Italy alone of the European powers had incurred defeat at the hands of native Africans. After acquiring the coastland colonies of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland she attempted to conquer the mountain kingdom of Abyssinia and was disastrously defeated at Adowa in 1896. Mussolini, who had overthrown the very unsuccessful parliamentary government of Italy in 1922, was determined to secure this long-coveted prize, and he thought he could do it without interference from outside. Britain would try to set the League in motion against him, on the ground that Abyssinia was a member of the League,<sup>1</sup> but if Italy defied the League, France, alarmed by the rising power of Nazi Germany, would not quarrel with Italy over anything as remote and unimportant as Abyssinia. That was, indeed, how matters worked out. During 1935 Mussolini contrived to work up a quarrel with Abyssinia and in October his armies invaded the country.

<sup>1</sup> Strange to say, it was at Italy's request that Abyssinia had been admitted to the League in 1923, Britain protesting against it on the ground that Abyssinia was not sufficiently civilized for admission.



The prestige of the League of Nations had for some time past been declining. America had never joined; Japan had left it on the question of Manchukuo; Germany had left it (as will be shown in the last chapter) on the question of disarmament; Italy was still nominally a member, but a rebel member; Russia had recently joined the League, but with what purpose no one knew. The League in 1935 was Britain and France and 'the rest'—fifty states more or less powerless for war or remote from Europe, or both. Could Britain and France and 'the rest' spoil Italy's chances of conquering Abyssinia without actually involving themselves in war with Italy? The policy recommended by the Covenant of the League for such a case as this was a policy of 'sanctions', or as we say 'boycotts'.<sup>1</sup> As soon as Italy opened her campaign the Assembly of the League declared Italy an aggressor and prohibited the export to Italy of arms and ammunition, aircraft, chemicals, rubber, steel, etc.

But Italy could continue to import what she wanted from countries outside the League such as Germany and the United States. The only export that might have stopped her was a prohibition of the export of oil to Italy. France, where Laval was at this time prime minister, was trying hard to secure an alliance with Italy against the growing danger from Germany. She would not consent to an oil sanction unless the British and French governments first offered Italy a large slice of Abyssinian territory on condition that she would leave the rest of the country alone. This proposal was accepted by Sir Samuel Hoare, the British foreign secretary, but British public opinion, strongly championing the League and the rights of Abyssinia, raised so vigorous a protest that the government was compelled to drop the Hoare-Laval proposal and Hoare himself had to resign from the government. It is a remarkable illustration of the power of freely expressed public opinion to control the actions of a government enjoying a large and newly elected House of Commons majority.

So no further steps were taken. France vetoed the oil sanction, and Britain, not yet rearmed, was not prepared to fight Italy on the Abyssinian question, since no member of the League would

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix II, Covenant of the League, article 16. 'Sanctions' is a term of Roman law, meaning penalties.

have given her any substantial support. The Italian conquest was completed in the spring of 1936.

*General election of 1935* In the summer of 1935 MacDonald had retired on account of failing health and Baldwin, hitherto his 'second in command', succeeded him as prime minister of the National government. In the autumn, after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the application of 'sanctions' but before the Hoare-Laval proposals, Baldwin dissolved parliament. The Labour party complained that by so doing he took them at a disadvantage because, since 'sanctions' were the question of the day and the Labour party supported the sanctions policy, there was really very little for the opposition to fight about. So it turned out. The government lost the altogether abnormal majority they had been given in 1931 but retained a majority of 247, larger than any government majority of Victoria's reign. This proved to be the last election before the second great war.

*Edward VIII* King George V had celebrated his silver jubilee, commemorating twenty five years on the throne, in May 1935 and died in the following January. His simplicity, modesty, and unwavering devotion to duty had called forth the love of his subjects. In the last years of his reign there was a general recognition that he had proved himself an ideal man for the unique position he occupied. His broadcast Christmas addresses from 1932 onwards had brought him nearer to the whole body of his subjects than any previous British sovereign. Before 1936 ended the reign of his eldest son Edward VIII was brought to a close by circumstances which, for a few weeks, riveted the attention of the world. King Edward was determined to marry an American lady, Mrs Simpson, who had already divorced one husband and was about to divorce another. King and prime minister discussed the problem in a frank and friendly manner, and Baldwin told the king that such a person would not be acceptable as queen to the people of Britain or of the British empire. King Edward had to choose between his crown and the woman he loved, and without hesitation he chose the latter. A deed of abdication was drawn up and all the necessary business was put through parliament in a single day. King Edward disappeared—he went abroad, with the title of Duke of Windsor—and his brother reigned in his stead as King George VI.

The episode impressed foreign opinion in much the same way as the general strike had done. It illustrated the remarkable stability and quietness of the British people when confronted with an event which would in most other countries have caused a grave disturbance. Many said at the time that the dignity of the British monarchy had been seriously impaired and that it would never be the same again. But it was not so. The incident affected no one but King Edward. In a few months all was exactly as if George VI had succeeded George V without a gap between them.

*Neville Chamberlain* In 1937 Baldwin retired on account of failing health and was succeeded by Neville Chamberlain. At last a member of this remarkable family had reached the premiership. His father might well have been selected as prime minister in 1902 and his elder brother was nearly chosen as leader of the Conservative party instead of Bonar Law in 1911. Neville Chamberlain, like his father, had devoted the prime of his life to business and to Birmingham, entering parliament in 1918 at the age of forty nine. He had distinguished himself as Minister of Health in the 1924-9 government and as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931 onwards. His interests were in social reform, but he was fated to devote practically all his attention as prime minister to foreign policy.

We have already entered the years containing the events leading up to the second great war, though excluding the events themselves from this chapter. It is worth while remarking on one big contrast between the years before 1914 and the years before 1939. In the years before 1914 Britain was suffering from a variety of domestic convulsions, Commons versus Lords, Unionists versus Home Rulers, labour versus capital, and even women versus men. These conflicts monopolized attention and the first great war came to most people as a surprise. The years before 1939, once the worst of the great slump was over, were years of almost unruffled calm at home. Attention concentrated on the Nazi menace, and the second great war was seen for several years to be visibly drawing nearer and nearer.

## XII

### *Inter-War Britain*

THE FIRST chapter described some characteristics of mid-Victorian Britain, and the sixth did the same for Britain at the opening of the new century; it remains to pick out a few salient features of Britain as she was between the two great wars.

*Population* If we start with the census of 1931<sup>1</sup> we find the population of Great Britain (England, Wales, and Scotland but not Ireland) was just under forty five millions. It was still slowly increasing, but not likely to continue to do so long, for reasons given in the first chapter. Indeed the increase only continued because emigration, so abundant in the nineteenth century, had almost ceased; in fact a small trickle of population into Britain exceeded the trickle out of it. 'New countries', including the British Dominions and the United States, had practically closed their doors to new-comers. The surest sign that population was about to decrease was the fact that it was already decreasing at its 'junior' end. The under 15 population had decreased from 12½ millions in 1911 to 10½ millions in 1931, whereas the population over 65 had increased from under a million in 1911 to nearly 1½ million in 1931. This means that even if the number of children born to each married couple remained the same for the next twenty years there would be fewer children born in 1950 than in 1930 because there would be fewer young married couples. This is a serious fact, but it is an experience shared in greater or less degree by practically all highly civilized countries. High civilizations are, as things stand at present, committing slow suicide.

*Town and country* Our population has not only a higher average age than it used to have, it is also more urban or town-dwelling. One quarter of the population live in really big towns

<sup>1</sup> A census has been taken every tenth year since 1801. It will doubtless be postponed in 1941 on account of the war.

of over 250,000, another quarter in towns of between 50,000 and 250,000, another 30 per cent in small towns, which leaves only 20 per cent in 'the country'. And of those in the country we must reckon a certain number who go into towns to work and use their country homes only for nights and week ends. Nearly all big towns show steadily increasing populations whereas many country villages show a decline.

This also is a serious fact, but less deplorable than it would have been in the past, for two reasons. For one thing, towns have been made much more healthy than they used to be. A great deal has been done (though much still remains to be done) by government slum clearance schemes to make the towns both more agreeable and more healthy for those who live in them. Towns have increased their areas more than they have increased their populations. There is less overcrowding, and even where the population per acre is densest, as in many London districts, it is more and more housed in modern flats and less in overcrowded alleys. The other reason why this urbanization is less deplorable than it might be is that there is much more cheap and easy access to the country, at week-ends and for annual holidays. A historian of the nineteenth century has said that one of the great features of the period was the spreading of 'respectability' to larger and larger classes, and he adds that the foundation of respectability was *soap*. The holiday making habit has also spread. The granting of annual holidays of a week or fortnight with full pay was extended to the greater part of the wage-earning classes during the period between the wars.

*Rich and poor* Karl Marx, the founder of communism in the middle of the nineteenth century, used to say that the rich would grow richer and the poor would grow poorer until our society was remodelled by a communist revolution. Exactly the opposite has happened in twentieth-century Britain: the rich have grown poorer and the poor have grown richer. Though we are a long way from economic equality we have moved a considerable distance towards it. Evidence of this would be far more obvious if we could travel backwards and forwards in time as we can in space, and pay a visit to 1890, say, as easily as we can to Scotland or America. We should find that between 1890 and 1940 the poorer classes have become better clothed, better housed, better

fed, and have more left over for amusement. The evidence of the decreased wealth of the rich is obvious even without such a journey. All over the west end of London the big houses of the rich have been converted into flats or offices. All over the country great country houses have been converted into schools or, if near towns, have surrendered their parks for building estates.

The causes of the increased wealth of the poor are mainly traceable to the coming of democracy in its various forms. Trade unions have compelled employers to grant better wages. The electorate has compelled parliament to increase the real wealth, as distinct from the money wages, of the poor by a vast extension of social services—education, insurance, pensions, housing, etc. The expenditure by central and local government authorities in the social services in 1934 came to the enormous sum of £446,800,000. Part of this was, of course, contributed by the poor themselves, more particularly through local taxation or rates, and through taxes on such articles as tobacco, beer, and sugar, but very much the greater part of it came from taxation of the comparatively rich. Similarly, the decreased wealth of the rich is mainly due to the high percentage of their incomes extracted from them annually by income tax and from their capital at death by death duties. The state has become, among other things, a machine for the wholesale redistribution of the national income. Lloyd George forecasted this in the speeches in his 1909 Budget, but he cannot have foreseen the lengths to which the process would go during the remainder of his own lifetime.

Parallel with this movement towards economic equality there has been a movement towards social equality. This cannot be proved by statistics, and indeed it is difficult to prove it or define it at all, but it is an undoubted fact of high importance. There has come in recent years to be much less feeling of *difference* based on class and occupation, people of different classes treat each other far more as fellow men and as equals. There is much less shyness between them. The poor do not suspect the rich of 'condescending' towards them, and the rich do not suspect the poor of being 'uppish'.

At the same time we are far from having the degree of social equality that prevails in France or America. In a very real sense

Britain is still an aristocratic type of society. Writing just before the beginning of our period Walter Bagebot, in his book *The English Constitution*, described us as a 'deferential society'. The poor were content to be voteless and to leave the parliamentary franchise to the middle classes, the middle classes preferred to elect as M.P.s members of the upper classes, and an upper class House of Commons was content to see the cabinet filled with members of the old nobility. Things have changed a good deal since then. None the less, a hundred and four Old Etonians were elected to the House of Commons in 1935, and even in the most wealthy of Conservative constituencies, such as Bournemouth, the great majority of the electors must be wage-earning people and their wives. This seems to show that in many parts of Britain, the so-called 'working' classes still prefer to entrust their political fortunes to members of the so-called 'upper' classes.<sup>1</sup> Even the Labour party has chosen as its present (1941) leader an Old Haileyburian.

*Communists and Fascists* All this points to the fact that we are on the whole a contented nation. Another proof of this is the failure of the rival parties of violence and revolution, the Communists and Fascists, to gain any considerable following. There has never been more than one Communist at a time in the House of Commons, as compared with 100 in the German parliament just before the rise of Hitler and 80 in the French parliament during the years immediately before the second great war. The Fascists have never contested an election. They made a stir for a few months in 1934 with organized and deliberately provocative processions through the more socialistic regions of London, but after an Act had been passed forbidding the wearing of political uniforms their activities died down. Their founder, Mosley, is not like Mussolini or Hitler a leader sprung from the working classes but a very wealthy member of the old landowner class.

*Decrease of drunkenness* One of the most obvious moral changes of the last fifty years has been the decrease in drunkenness. It would be true to say that tea rather than beer was now

<sup>1</sup> It may be said that Old Etonians, being wealthy, have a better chance of entering on parliamentary life than others. This is true. The point is that in each of these constituencies the electorate were free to choose between an Old Etonian and some one else, and choose the Old Etonian. (The author was not educated at Eton.)

general way about distant countries and earlier periods which he or she would never have acquired from books. But in so far as the cinema has competed successfully with the reading of books its influence has been bad. The worst of the cinema as a recreation is that it is wholly passive. Just as it does one more good to walk or bicycle in the country than to be carried through it in a car, so it does one more good to read a book, however trivial, than to sit and gape at a succession of pictures.

*Wireless* More important, and far more beneficial, than the cinema is the wireless, which came into general use in about 1926. Popular newspapers on the Harmsworth model (see p. 70) appeal more to sensationalism, prejudice, and frivolity than to intelligence, and it is difficult to exaggerate the value of the daily wireless news bulletins in forming the mind of an intelligent democracy. The wireless, supplemented by the gramophone, has doubtless also spread much more widely than before the taste for good music. Those who leave their wireless on all day and do not really listen, but treat it as simply a background to other activities do themselves no good, but probably not much harm. Still it would be better if they sang to themselves over their work instead of 'turning on' some one else to sing for them.

*The Arts* If we glance for a moment at the high arts and those who practise them, we are struck at once by a singular and deplorable fact, of which we noted the beginnings in an earlier chapter. Never before has serious contemporary art been so remote from the taste of the ordinary man. Serious modern music, serious modern painting, serious modern poetry seem to appeal not to the general public but to small specialized publics of musicians, painters, and poets—small 'sets' associated with Chelsea and Bloomsbury. The ordinary person who appreciates the poetry, the music, and the painting of past ages very often cannot make out what the modern masters, if they are masters, are trying to do. The poetry seems neither to rhyme nor scan nor make sense, the painting seems to be deliberately unlike the objects it purports to represent, and the music seems to be all discords outside the key system which one has learnt to regard as the language of music. This is perhaps an exaggeration, but it is an exaggeration of an admitted fact. Thousands of people



will flock, night by night, during the 'Promenade' season in London, to listen to the music of Germans who died more than a hundred years ago, where only a handful would go to hear the masterpieces of the serious composers of their own day. This is strange. Where the fault lies it is not for us to determine.

*The future* It is not the business of a historian to prophesy. Whether there will be great changes after the present war is over, in the constitution and habits of British society, we cannot say. The tendency during a war is to expect and demand great changes for the better. On the whole the changes in British society that followed the first great war were changes for the better, but they were, apart from the coming of entirely new inventions like the wireless, changes along lines already marked out by the tendencies of the pre-war period. There was nothing revolutionary about them. It may be so again.

The prospects for the continent of Europe are entirely different. There once had an international organization, or lack of organization, which produced two great wars and, if restored, would produce another. It has got to be changed, or we perish. The history of British society as a thing in itself has, however, been a much happier story. We want it to continue to improve, but if it can preserve its essential features of liberty and parliamentary democracy, most of us will be very well satisfied.

## XIII

### *Pre-War Again*

#### I THE GERMAN REVOLUTIONS, 1918-33

*The Weimar republic* November 1918 witnessed the end not only of the first great war but also Bismarck's German Empire. The Kaiser abdicated and disappeared, and so did all the other German kings and princes. In old days these kings and princes had been rulers of more or less independent German states, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, and the like, under the nominal authority of an emperor whose headquarters were in Austria. Bismarck had excluded Austria from his new Germany, and exalted his own sovereign, the king of Prussia, to the imperial title, reducing the other kings and princes to a subordinate position. Most of these dynasties had occupied their thrones for hundreds of years. The first Hohenzollern, for example, began to rule in Berlin in 1415, the year of Agincourt, now after 503 years the last of them had gone. Germany became a republic with an ex-saddler, Ebert, as its president, and proceeded to establish a parliamentary system, called the Weimar constitution.

The Weimar republic, as it is sometimes called, lasted for fourteen years. At no time during its brief existence did it rouse the enthusiasm or stir the loyalty of the German people. To them it was simply a symbol of their defeat. The Germans have no aptitude or liking for parliamentary institutions, and the new system produced no statesmen, with the possible exception of Stresemann, showing any real gift for leadership. From first to last the system was fiercely attacked both by communists who wanted 'red revolution' rather than the milk-and-water German revolution of 1918, and by nationalists who wanted, somehow or other, the restoration of the old ruling class and a war of revenge against the victors of the previous war. The history of the republic was one long succession of disasters—first the treaty of

Versailles, then the occupation of the Ruhr and the collapse of the mark, and finally the great slump of 1929

*The rise of Hitler* The great slump came to Germany as a sudden and unexpected ending to the years of prosperity based on borrowed money which she had enjoyed since the establishment of the Dawes Plan in 1924. Immediately before the Dawes Plan, only five years back, she had experienced the collapse of the mark, and the first thought of every German now was—we must not, we *will* not suffer again what we suffered in 1923 when our money turned to waste paper. But how was that fate to be avoided? The republican politicians were utterly discredited. Communism was a growing menace. A saviour was required, some one who would perform a miracle for Germany such as Napoleon had performed for France after the chaos of the French revolution, and Mussolini had performed for Italy in much less alarming circumstances in 1922. And the saviour was already offering his services, with all the resources of modern propaganda and modern gangsterism—Adolf Hitler.

Hitler had issued his first programme and begun the formation of his party, recruited from unemployed ex-service men, very soon after the end of the first great war. The programme was called National Socialism, and both terms were full of meaning. As a socialist Hitler's object was to exterminate private capitalism and bring the whole wealth of the country under the control of the state. He proposed to reorganize society in the interests of discipline and efficiency, to sacrifice liberty for what he conceived as the common good. Though he declared that his policy was the opposite of communism it had a great deal in common with it. As a nationalist Hitler was then determined to restore the German *race* to its rightful position as a *Herrenvolk* or Master-race. He claimed that the Germans were the finest and purest type of the Nordic stock. This word 'Nordic' had been invented by scientists to describe a real or imaginary primitive race, which had supplied one of the three or four main sources of European population. It included the Germans, the Scandinavians, and (in a diluted form) the British, but not of course the French or the Poles or the Czechs, nor Hitler's friends at a later date, the Russians and Italians. The 'German race' was not the same thing as the people of Germany. The million German Jews were

expressly excluded, whereas German-speaking people in Austria and elsewhere outside Germany came within the definition. To secure their rightful position in Europe the German race must present a united front. The professed aim of Hitler's party was the extinction of all other parties. The party must include the whole race—totalitarianism. And the race must secure not only unity within the frontiers of its actual habitation, but also *Lebensraum*, living space, by the conquest of the lesser races which had the misfortune to be Germany's neighbours.

These ideas, and much more to the same effect, were set forth in his vast book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), which he began to write during a brief imprisonment after an unsuccessful rebellion in 1923, and finished and published in 1926. It is extraordinary that Hitler should have formed such designs long before there appeared any prospect of his getting control of Germany. It is more extraordinary that, by 1940, he should have made so much progress towards carrying them out. But what is most extraordinary of all, perhaps, is that most of the statesmen of other countries, who had to deal with Hitler during the years after he came into power and before the outbreak of the second great war, should have continued to regard *Mein Kampf* as the extravagant dream of a fanatic. After each step forward Hitler declared that it was his last, and that he was now prepared to rest from his labours, at peace with all men. And he was believed—although he had declared on page after page of his book that the making and breaking of pledges would be an essential part of his method.

The figures polled by the Nazis<sup>1</sup> at successive elections show the fortunes of the party during the ten years before it came into power. In May 1924, just before the Dawes Plan, they polled nearly 2,000,000 votes and secured 32 seats, in December 1924, when the Stresemann policy was beginning to justify itself, 900,000 votes and only 14 seats, in 1928, when the prosperity of the Stresemann period was well established, 800,000 and 12 seats, in 1930, when the slump was already deepening, 6,400,000 and 107 seats, in July 1932, 13,700,000 and 230 seats, in November of the same year 11,700,000 and 196 seats—a slight setback, in

<sup>1</sup> 'Nazi' is simply the first two syllables of 'National' as pronounced in German.

March 1933, when Hitler had already been appointed Chancellor, 17,300,000 and 288 seats. Even this was less than half the Reichstag (or parliament) with its 646 seats, but some other parties allied with Hitler to give him a clear majority, and this majority used its power to bring government by Reichstag and parliamentary methods to an end. Hitler was entrusted with a four years' dictatorship. We must now see how Hitler had become Chancellor.

*The Nazi revolution* In 1932 Brüning, the last German chancellor to owe his position to a parliamentary majority, was struggling with the problems of the slump and its six million unemployed. Even in comparatively prosperous Britain the National government had had to impose drastic increases of taxation and reductions in the pay of every one in government employ—soldiers and sailors, teachers, policemen, and postmen. Brüning was trying to do the same sort of thing in Germany in much more difficult conditions. Failing to get his measures through the Reichstag he got the permission of Hindenburg (the old commander in chief, who had succeeded Ebert as President in 1925) to issue them as emergency decrees. Brüning's government, the 'starvation government' as it was called, was intensely unpopular. The vast numbers of the unemployed swelled the ranks of both the Nazi storm troops and the less disciplined ranks of the communists. These rebel armies, for such they were, rioted in protest against the decrees. Hindenburg dismissed Brüning and, after two more phantom chancellors had come and gone, offered the post to Hitler in January 1933. The election which followed was preceded by the burning of the Reichstag building. The communists were accused of this crime, but it is generally supposed that it was burned by the Nazis as an aid to their election campaign. The result of the election was recorded in the previous paragraph.

One of Hitler's first acts was to appoint Goebbels minister of propaganda, an office which he still holds (1941) and for which he has proved himself perfectly suited. There followed a series of decrees, the main purpose of which was to abolish all powers of local government still enjoyed by the old German kingdoms, Prussia, Bavaria, and the rest, and to destroy the rights and privileges of such voluntary organizations as churches and trade

unions and the rival political parties. Henceforth a German was allowed only one loyalty—to Hitler, his Führer (Leader), a German could be either a Nazi or a traitor, and the consequences of choosing the latter alternative would be most unpleasant.

*The Disarmament Conference* While these events had been in progress another series of events had also come to a crisis. Under the terms of the Locarno treaties the League of Nations had been entrusted with the task of preparing for a great Disarmament Conference, which would arrange for the progressive disarmament of all states, in accordance with promises vaguely made in the treaty of Versailles. At Versailles the victors had ordained the disarmament of Germany, postponing their own disarmament till a more convenient time. That sure could not, it was agreed, be postponed for ever. In fact the Disarmament Conference met at Lausanne in 1932, with Arthur Henderson, who had been foreign secretary in the second Labour government, as its chairman. France, Germany, and all the states concerned were represented.

## II THE NAZI MENACE, 1933-9

*Poland and Czechoslovakia* We have now to follow the steps by which Hitler prepared for his war of vengeance on the victors of Versailles. At first he had to proceed with extreme caution, for if his enemies had realized what he had in store for them they could, any time up to and including 1936, have marched in and destroyed him. One of his first acts in foreign policy was designed to prove to the world his pacific intentions. In January 1934 he signed a ten years' non-aggression pact with Poland. Every one knew that the German-Polish frontier was one of the most unsatisfactory parts of the Versailles settlement. Hitler by this treaty proclaimed his intention of accepting the settlement for ten years, or at any rate only pressing for such alterations as the Poles would willingly accept. Poland swallowed the bait and became friendly with Germany, drifting away from her former ally France. France thereupon turned to Russia, and a Franco-Russian alliance was signed in May 1935, Russia undertaking to protect Czechoslovakia against German aggression, a duty to which France had already pledged herself by the Locarno treaty ten years earlier. Thus a new pattern was forming itself. Of the two most obviously threatened of Germany's non-German neighbours, one accepted a Hitler pledge, the other accepted the pledges of France and Russia.

*Austria* There was another, but not non-German, neighbour of Germany whose continued existence as a separate state seemed even more precarious, namely Austria. Austria was the German speaking remnant of the old Austro-Hungarian empire. Perhaps it should never have been an independent state. At the time of the Versailles settlement a demand for the union (*anschluss*) of the Austrian Germans with the German republic had been vetoed by France, and an economic union of Austria and Germany had been vetoed by the International Court at The Hague as recently as 1931. When Hitler assumed power in Germany the ruler of Austria was Dollfuss, an anti-Nazi and an ally of Italy, which at that date was most anxious to preserve the Austrian republic as a buffer state between Italy and Germany. In July 1934 Dollfuss was murdered by Austrian Nazis, probably acting under instructions from Berlin. It is

possible that Hitler intended to annex Austria on this occasion, but the firm line taken by Mussolini persuaded him to draw back. Austria had rather less than four years' respite

In fact Italy, like Russia, was at this date thoroughly alarmed by the German menace, and turned towards France. A Franco-Italian treaty signed at the end of 1934 granted certain Italian demands in East Africa, where French Somaliland bordered Italian Eritrea. Mussolini was already preparing for his Abyssinian venture

*Anglo-German naval treaty* While France was trying to draw nearer to Russia and Italy she was feeling somewhat coolly towards Britain, for in this same year, 1935, Hitler had negotiated a naval agreement with Britain, by which he undertook to limit his strength in surface vessels to 35 per cent of that of the British navy. The treaty was part of the policy laid down in *Memoirs of Kaiser Wilhelm II* and attempted also by the Kaiser's government before the first great war, of securing if possible the neutrality of Britain in the oncoming struggle. It was not denounced or broken by Hitler till the summer of 1939 when he realized that British neutrality was beyond his hopes

*The Stresa declaration* However, Britain, France, and Italy were now acting together, and when, in March 1935, Hitler formally repudiated the whole of the armaments clauses of the treaty of Versailles and proclaimed conscription as henceforth the law of Germany, Mussolini invited the premiers and foreign ministers of Britain and France to meet him at Stresa on Lake Maggiore. Here the three governments issued a joint declaration condemning the German action in the most solemn and outspoken terms.



lunched his country on the conquest of Abyssinia, denounced whole-heartedly by Britain and half heartedly by France. By the time he had conquered Abyssinia Mussolini had come to the conclusion that he had more to gain and less to fear from a German alliance than from an alliance with the western democracies (For the Abyssinian story see p 169)

*The Saar* Three months before the Stresa declaration a piece of great good fortune fell in Hitler's way. By the treaty of Versailles, which he was so fond of denouncing, the separation of the Saar province from Germany was to terminate at the end of fifteen years. This period ended in January 1935, and a free vote of the population, supervised by British and Italian forces, was held to decide their future destiny. Ninety per cent voted for reincorporation with the German Reich.<sup>1</sup> The return of the Saar to Germany was in no sense one of Hitler's achievements. It would have happened at this time though no Nazi revolution had ever occurred. None the less it was naturally a matter for jubilation in Germany and was represented as a Nazi achievement by the German Press. It will be noticed that Hitler's denunciation of the armament clauses of the Versailles treaty was not made until after he had pocketed his profits under another section of the same treaty.

*The Rhineland* Having secured the small though important province of the Saar by no effort of his own, Hitler began to concentrate his attention on the Rhineland, for though the Allied occupation had ended, German troops were forbidden by the treaty of Versailles to enter it. This wide belt of territory was to be permanently demilitarized, and at Locarno Germany had voluntarily accepted this arrangement. It was the principal security of France against the superior man power of Germany.

In March 1936, in the course of a speech in which Hitler declared, on the flimsiest of arguments, that the treaty of Locarno had been rendered invalid by the Franco-Russian alliance, he announced that German troops were at that very moment marching into the Rhineland. It is said that the German military experts earnestly warned Hitler against this step, telling him that

<sup>1</sup> The occupation of the Rhineland by foreign troops was due to terminate at the same time but actually it had been terminated five years earlier (1930)

the German army was as yet in no condition to fight. Hitler told them that they would not have to fight, and he was right. British opinion, though disliking Hitler's methods, did not altogether disapprove of his object. It seemed to most British people absurd that, so long as armies existed, an independent state should not be free to place its armies where it pleased in its own territory.<sup>1</sup> Hitler had cleverly chosen to begin with an act of aggression, immensely important for the future defence of Germany, over which he knew that the British sense of fair play would divide British opinion. The Council of the League of Nations condemned the German action as a breach of treaties—and that was all. Italy was no longer on the Council, being engaged, in conquering Abyssinia.

After the Rhineland coup Hitler made fresh declarations of his pacific intentions. 'The period of so-called surprises,' he said, 'has come to an end. As a nation enjoying equality of rights, Germany, conscious of her European task, will loyally collaborate in solving the problems which confront us like other nations.' He went out of his way to state that he had no designs against Austria, Czechoslovakia, or Poland. He could not understand the reluctance of 'the democracies', Britain and France, to negotiate a new Locarno with him immediately after he had torn up the old one. He could only attribute it to the malignant influence of communists and Jews. At the same time he feverishly quickened the pace of his rearmament. In 1937 the German-Italian alliance, commonly called the Berlin-Rome axis, was celebrated by Mussolini's visit to Berlin. What, Mussolini asked, would be the result of that meeting? 'The Führer and I can answer with a loud voice: Peace!'

*British rearmament.* Others did not share that opinion. Britain had been the last of the great powers to abandon the optimism of the post-Locarno years and to realize that Hitler was moving cautiously, but rapidly, towards a position in which he could defy the victors of the first great war and stake all the resources of Germany on a war of vengeance. Early in 1935, at

<sup>1</sup> A fairly close parallel was the clause of the treaty after the Crimean war forbidding Russia to have a naval base on the Black Sea. Palmerston, its chief author, did not expect it to last more than ten years. Actually it lasted fifteen years.

the time of the Stresa declaration, the British government had issued a warning that rearmament might be necessary, and had called attention to the possibility, rather unobtrusively, in their election programme in the autumn of the same year. But the British public was at that time quite unalarmed, the Labour opposition was thoroughly pacifist and, as Baldwin said two years later in a speech which he described as 'appallingly frank', if the government had gone all out for rearmament in the 1935 election they would probably have lost their majority. In 1937, however, Baldwin's government announced a big rearmament programme and set to work on it at once. The Labour opposition protested, but the welcome accorded to the programme throughout the country was unmistakable. It expressed feelings deeper than any party politics. However, rearmament programmes take time before they can produce results. The first year or more is mostly spent in making the machines that will make the munitions.

*The Spanish civil war* In 1936 civil war broke out in Spain (whose king had been deposed in 1930) between rival factions, one side, led by General Franco, roughly resembled the Italian Fascists, the other was a coalition of Liberals and Communists. Italy and Germany sent both munitions and troops to support Franco, France and Russia gave less effective assistance to the other side. In Britain opinion was divided. Those who inclined towards socialism supported the Liberal-Communist groups, while a section of Conservative opinion supported Franco. Most people probably took the line that the Spanish civil war was no affair of ours, and the main object of the British government was to secure that the Spaniards should be left to settle their affairs for themselves. A non-intervention committee was established in London and all the great powers of Europe were represented on it. It certainly did not prevent intervention, by every continental great power, on one side or the other, but it may have kept intervention within narrower limits than would have otherwise been the case.

After two years of fighting Franco's forces won, and a system akin to Fascism was established in Spain. Some feared that Spain would in consequence become a close ally of Germany and Italy and join them in any general European war that might

follow. This was an alarming prospect, but so far it has not been realized. However, the fact remains that British foreign policy, though extremely well meaning, had failed over the Spanish civil war, as it had failed, and was for another year to continue to fail, in relation to the aggressive designs of Japan, Italy, and Germany. None of the issues raised, until that of Poland in 1939, was such as to convince the British public as a whole that our standpoint must be maintained, if necessary, by force of arms, and without force little could be accomplished in international affairs during the nineteen thirties.

*Austria* Some months before the end of the Spanish civil war Hitler had committed another and more startling act of aggression. By the beginning of 1938 he had persuaded Mussolini to accept what he had objected to so strongly four years before, namely the destruction of the independence of Austria. In February 1938 Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor, was summoned to interview Hitler at his country house at Berchtesgaden, just outside the Austrian frontier, and told that he must include the leading Austrian Nazis in his cabinet. Apparently he agreed, but a few weeks after his return to Austria he announced that there would be a plebiscite, or popular vote, of all Austrian citizens in which they would be invited to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question whether they wished Austria to remain independent of Germany. There would probably, it is said, have been a two-thirds majority for independence, and Hitler was determined to prevent this plebiscite. It was due for March 12. Hitler sent in his troops who occupied the country without any serious opposition on March 11. A month later a 'free' plebiscite under Nazi management showed a 99.7 majority for union with Germany!

Once again the objective was cleverly chosen. The Austrians were, after all, Germans, and many British people who disliked Nazi methods had, before the rise of Hitler, declared that Austria ought to be joined to Germany. In any case it was all over, and apparently approved by those most concerned, before there was time to do anything about it.

*Czechoslovakia* The annexation of Austria placed Czechoslovakia in obvious peril, for the western and more important half of the country, the ancient province of Bohemia with the capital, Prague, and the Skoda munition works, was now

surrounded on three sides by German territory Czechoslovakia was admittedly a multi-national state with a fringe of three and a half million Germans—Sudeten Germans they were called—mostly living round the northern and western frontiers. These frontiers had not been drawn in accordance with the line of racial cleavage but in accordance with geography and tradition. The frontier ran along the mountain ranges that had for centuries been the frontier between the dominions of the Austrian Hapsburgs and those of other German states, Bavaria, Saxony, and Prussia.

Czechoslovakia was the only state in central Europe that had retained a parliamentary system and a reasonably free Press. The Sudeten Germans had proper parliamentary representation and their own newspapers. No doubt the Czechs and the Germans disliked each other. For centuries a German (Austrian) government in Vienna had given the Germans advantages over the Czechs, and no doubt the Czech government at Prague, under Masaryk and his successor Benes, had given the Czechs advantages over the Germans. But the grievances of the Sudeten Germans could have been met. They were in any case better treated than almost any other 'minority' population in any European state. Henlein, the local leader of the Sudeten Germans, never demanded the separation of the Sudeten areas from the rest of Czechoslovakia until the summer of 1938 when Hitler took control of him and used him and his party for the disruption of Czechoslovakia.

Throughout that summer Henlein, now Hitler's puppet, made demands of increasing magnitude. Each time the Czech government tried to meet these demands Henlein demanded more. Meanwhile Hitler's speeches and the Nazi Press poured forth a stream of abuse on the 'Czech tyranny' and the outrages endured by the supposedly downtrodden Sudeten Germans.

Britain had at no time guaranteed the frontiers of Czechoslovakia, but France was pledged to defend them and Daladier, the French premier, renewed that pledge in July 1938. Any Franco-German war would certainly involve Britain. The British government therefore sent out Lord Runciman, a former member of the cabinet, to Czechoslovakia to examine the situation, and he reported that, whatever the real merits of the case, the

agitation had reached such a pitch that the Czech government could no longer govern the Sudeten areas, and had better, in their own interests, surrender them. But would the Czechs, with France and Russia pledged to support almost certain to support France, be willing to surrender a wide stretch of territory containing all the fortifications?

*Chamberlain meets Hitler.* With withdrawal of the British prime minister September 15 to interview Hitler. Hitler determined to annex the Sudeten areas, willing to receive by arrangement what was to be taken by force, if the British and French go to bring pressure to bear on Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain said that he could not represent the matter with his colleagues and his

*Godesberg* Exactly a week later he went to Godesberg on the Rhine, bringing the British, French, and Czech governments. It seems that Hitler never expected to raise his terms. Chamberlain had expected the frontiers to be drawn by impartial arbiters; the peoples of the disputed area, not to be forced as had been done in the past. Hitler demanded immediate surrender of the whole of an area selected by his advisers, only postponing the completion of the annexation from October 1 to October 10. Chamberlain returned to England without either accepting or refusing this demand, and war seemed inevitable.

*Munich* However, a week later, on September 29, the British and French premiers and Mussolini met Hitler at Munich, and the separation of the Sudeten areas from Czechoslovakia was accepted on Hitler's terms. As a consolation Chamberlain brought back from Munich a 'scrap of paper' signed by Hitler and himself, in which each undertook that 'the method of consultation shall be the method adopted to deal with any other questions that may concern our two countries', etc. While Germany was despoiling Czechoslovakia in the west her jackals,



agitation had reached such a pitch that the Czech government could no longer govern the Sudeten areas, and had better, in their own interests, surrender them. But would the Czechs, with France and Russia pledged to support them, and Britain almost certain to support France, be willing to surrender a wide stretch of territory containing all their strongest frontier fortifications?

*Chamberlain meets Hitler* With war perhaps only a few days off the British prime minister flew to Berchtesgaden on September 15 to interview Hitler. Hitler made it plain that he was determined to annex the Sudeten districts but was perfectly willing to receive by arrangement what he would otherwise take by force, if the British and French governments were prepared to bring pressure to bear on Czechoslovakia to surrender them. Chamberlain said that he could not reply until he had discussed the matter with his colleagues and his ally.

*Godesberg* Exactly a week later he met Hitler again, this time at Godesberg on the Rhine, bringing with him the consent of the British, French, and Czech governments to Hitler's demands. It seems that Hitler never expected such compliance and at once raised his terms. Chamberlain had doubtless expected the new frontiers to be drawn by impartial authority after a free vote of the peoples of the disputed area, supervised perhaps by neutral forces as had been done in the Saar. Hitler demanded the immediate surrender of the whole of an area selected by his own advisers, only postponing the completion of the annexation from October 1 to October 10. Chamberlain returned to England without either accepting or refusing this demand, and war seemed inevitable.

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risk as, two and a half years before, he had taken over the Rhineland occupation. However that may be, the British government, with the ink of the Munich agreement scarcely dry, redoubled its efforts at rearmament.

*Persecution of Jews* The winter of 1938-9 was devoted by the Nazi government to a persecution of Jews far surpassing what had gone before since the Nazis had come into power. On the subject of Jews Hitler is no doubt not quite sane. Tens of thousands of these unhappy people were deprived of all their property, the less fortunate were tortured to death in internment camps, the more fortunate allowed to leave the country and accept the charitable assistance of other lands. Vast relief funds were raised both by non German Jews and by others. A British appeal, launched by a broadcast address from Lord Baldwin, raised over £400,000.

*Destruction of Czechoslovakia* In March 1939, on a pretext of disorder in the country, Hitler suddenly annexed all that was left of Czechoslovakia. He declared, after the event, that the country was and long had been part of the rightful *Lebensraum*, (living space) of the German people. He thus not only tore up the Munich agreement, he also explicitly abandoned his former limited policy and put forward a new one. Hitherto he had said, "We don't want the Czechs in the Reich", now he announced that their land belonged to the Germans, who as a superior race (*Herrenvolk*) needed the land of their neighbours. As for the human livestock (*Herdenvolk*) on that land the Germans would use it for their profit, it appeared. If this doctrine applied to Czechoslovakia, why not equally to Poland or Hungary or Rumania? It looked as if the wildest and most outrageous aspirations of *Mein Kampf* were, after all, the deliberate policy of its author—who now controlled the most powerful army and air force in the world.

*Albania* A month later Mussolini invaded and annexed Albania, and thus acquired a footing in the Balkans. King Zog, the ruler of that mountainous and backward country, was added to the rapidly lengthening list of ex rulers of obliterated states.

*Poland* Faced with these international crimes the British government took a remarkable step. Hitherto we had always



refused to make treaties guaranteeing existing frontiers on the farther side of Germany. We regarded these frontiers as experimental novelties of the treaty of Versailles, and did not wish to encourage the idea that they were outside the scope of peaceful revision. Now, however, there was no hope of peaceful revision but only of brute force. Within a month of the destruction of Czechoslovakia we undertook that 'in the event of any action which clearly threatens Polish independence and which the Polish government considers vital to resist with their national forces' we 'would feel ourselves bound at once to lend the Polish government all the support in our power'. Similar treaties were made with Rumania and Greece. By an Anglo-Turkish treaty Britain and Turkey undertook to assist one another if either was attacked by any enemy except Russia.

The complicated arrangements on the Baltic frontier of Germany and Poland, the Polish corridor and the free city of Danzig, have already been described (see p. 132). It was an arrangement which could only work satisfactorily if all the parties concerned wished to make the best of it. Hitler had undertaken to accept it for ten years in 1934, and in his recent speeches he had pointedly contrasted Poland with Czechoslovakia, describing Poland as a genuine national state entitled to respect. However, the Nazi party in Danzig had, in 1937, secured control of the government of that city. The Danzigers had a genuine grievance in the fact that Poland had for many years been creating a rival port at Gdynia on Polish territory, which would serve as an outlet for their trade if ever Danzig was annexed to East Prussia—assuming of course that Poland retained her 'corridor'.

Throughout the summer months of 1939 Germany repeated against Poland the tactics she had used in the previous year against Czechoslovakia. Polish 'tyranny' and 'cruelty' towards the downtrodden Germans living in Poland were denounced in German Press day after day. The problems of Danzig and the corridor were made the subject of demands of ever increasing severity. The Poles, like the Czechs, did their best to meet all reasonable demands, but a peaceful settlement was not Hitler's object.

*The Russo-German treaty.* Meanwhile the British and French governments were engaged in negotiations with Russia, for

Russia and Germany still appeared irreconcilable enemies, but the negotiations made no progress and we now know that the Russians were secretly negotiating with Germany at the same time. It was not unnatural that Hitler and Stalin should come together. Nazi-ism and Communism have much more in common with each other than either has with democracy. Further, Germany could agree to let Russia have the eastern and mainly Russian half of Poland and the little Baltic States to the north, whereas we had no such bribes to offer. It was an ominous fact that, early in the summer, the comparatively friendly Litvinov was removed from the Russian foreign office and his place taken by Molotov.

On August 23 Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign secretary, flew to Moscow to sign the Russo-German pact by which each state undertook to remain neutral while the other was at war. All was now ready. Before the end of the month Hitler declared that Poland had refused his 'final offer' of sixteen points—an offer which was never seen by the Polish government till after Hitler had declared that it had been refused. On September 1 the German armies invaded Poland. On September 3 Britain and France were at war with Germany. The Armistice of November 11, 1918, had failed by two months to attain its twenty first birthday.

Italy, as in the opening months of the first great war, remained neutral, or as her ruler preferred to say, non belligerent. At any rate Mussolini made no secret of his sympathies and his ambitions. Throughout the months preceding the outbreak of war the Italian Press had been clamouring for Nice, Corsica, and Tunis, all of them territories in possession of France. Nice had been ceded to France in part payment for the help given by Napoleon III against Austria in the Italian war of liberation, 1859. Corsica, once attached to the old republic of Genoa, had become a French possession in 1768, a year before the birth of the first Napoleon. Tunis had been acquired by France when it was already partly colonized by Italians in 1881. For the present it suited Germany that Italy should remain neutral. So long as she was neutral she could import, for her own use and Germany's also

## APPENDIX I

### *President Wilson's Fourteen Points*

FOR THE historical context of the Fourteen Points see page 128. The points originally appeared as a statement of American war aims in an address delivered to a Joint Session of both Houses of Congress on January 8, 1918, and ran as follows:

1 Open covenants openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in public view.

2 Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas outside territorial waters alike in peace and war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

3 The removal as far as possible of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

4 Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

5 A free, open minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

6 The evacuation of all Russian territory, and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy, and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing, and more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded to Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs

as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy

7 Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations

8 All French territory should be freed, and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted

9 A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality

10 The peoples of Austria Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development

11 Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro, should be evacuated, occupied territories restored, Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea, and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality

12 The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities that are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations, under international guarantees

13 An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence should be guaranteed by international covenant

14 A general association of nations should be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike

Three subsequent speeches contained similar but less detailed statements, all alike accepted by the Allies and by Germany as a basis for the future peace settlement in the correspondence that preceded the armistice. These other sets of points can be found in the article on *The Fourteen Points* in the 1927 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

When the European Allies found themselves invited, at the

end of October 1918, to accept Wilson's Points as a basis for the future peace settlement they sought from Colonel House, Wilson's representative in Paris, an interpretation of the more obscure passages Colonel House's commentary on the Points will be found in *The Private Papers of Colonel House*. The general effect was to reduce the more alarming 'Points' to harmlessness. For example Point 3 might seem to mean the establishment of universal free trade. According to Colonel House it was not intended to forbid any tariffs or port restrictions so long as they were applied against all foreign countries alike. To Point 4, dealing with disarmament, Colonel House interpreted the phrase 'domestic safety' to mean self defence. Point 5, dealing with colonial claims, did not mean (as the Germans very naturally supposed) that they were to have a fair share—whatever that might be—of colonial territory, but only that whatever nation received these colonies was to be responsible for them to the League of Nations. Point 2 Lloyd George insisted on excluding, whatever interpretation Colonel House might place upon it. He declared roundly that Great Britain would not accept a formula which seemed to deny her right to use her sea power for the purpose of blockade in time of war. Point 1 did not mean that diplomatic negotiations should henceforth be conducted in public (which would be absurd, though it is what the Point seems to say) but simply that when negotiations had resulted in treaties, such treaties should be published.

## APPENDIX II

### *The Covenant of the League of Nations*

THE COVENANT constitutes the first chapter of the Treaty of Versailles. It is too long to be quoted in full. The following is a brief summary of its twenty six articles, together with some notes thereon, which are placed within brackets.

1 Membership of the League is confined to the forty two self governing states or dominions mentioned by name in the Covenant together with those afterwards elected by a two thirds majority of the Assembly. Members may retire from the League on giving two years' notice.

2 The League shall act by means of an Assembly, a Council, and a Secretariat.

3 At the Assembly each member may have three representatives but one vote only. It may deal with any matter affecting the peace or welfare of the world in general. [In practice, the Assembly met once a year.]

4 The Council was to consist of representatives of Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States (which refused to join. At later dates Germany and Russia were admitted). These were permanent members. There were also to be four temporary member states (subsequently six) elected by the Assembly from time to time at its discretion. Any other state might send a representative when matters were to be discussed which specially affected its interests. [The Council met three or four times a year.]

5 Except on matters of procedure, all decisions of the Council or the Assembly required a unanimous vote, except where otherwise provided in the Covenant.

6 The Secretariat shall consist of a Secretary General (Sir Eric Drummond being nominated as the first holder of the post) and such staff as he may require. [The staff was, so far as possible, composed of citizens of all the states belonging to the League.]

7 Geneva to be the headquarters of the League.

8 Plans are to be drafted by the Council for the general reduction of national armaments. Members of the League

undertake to exchange full and frank information as to their military, naval, and air programmes

9 A permanent advisory commission on armaments to be appointed

10 'Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League. In case of any such aggression or of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled' [This article is quoted in full]

11 Any threat of war concerns the whole League. Any such threat or 'any circumstance whatever affecting the good understanding between nations on which peace depends' may be brought before the Council by any member of the League

12 Members undertake that if any dispute should arise between them likely to lead to a rupture of the peace they will submit the matter either to arbitration by a neutral state or judicial settlement (by The Hague international tribunal) or to inquiry by the Council, and that they will in no case resort to war until three months after an award has been given or a report has been issued by the Council

13 Disputes on questions of fact or international law or the interpretation of a treaty should generally be submitted to the international tribunal

14 Arrangements for the establishment of the tribunal, or Court of International Justice [It was established at The Hague in 1921]

15 The Council is to inquire into all disputes not otherwise settled, and to endeavour to bring the parties to agreement. If it fails it is to report on the merits of the case. If its report is unanimous, except for the votes of the parties to the dispute, members agree not to go to war with any state that accepts the award

16 Members undertake to combine, by diplomatic pressure, suspension of trade, or if necessary, armed force, to prevent a resort to war in breach of the above agreements. It shall be the duty of the Council to recommend what steps members shall take in such circumstances, and it shall be the duty of members to support one another against any reprisals taken by the state against whom action is being taken. [Thus was the clause under which the League acted against Italy over the Abyssinian question in 1935-6]

17 Provisions regarding disputes between members and states which are not members of the League. Such states are to be invited to make use of the facilities of the League provided in articles 12-15, and if they refuse to do so they are to be treated as in article 16.

18 No treaty to be binding unless registered with the League.

19 The Assembly is empowered to 'advise' the reconsideration of treaties which may be out of date. [Since such advice had to be unanimous it was not likely to be offered. One of the weaknesses of the League was that it possessed, on paper, great powers for preserving the *status quo* and very little power to make by peaceable means the changes which the passage of time would require.]

20 No obligations inconsistent with the Covenant (e.g. alliances of the old type) are to remain binding on members of the League. [For example Hitler claimed that the Franco-Russian treaty of 1935 was invalid and a breach of the Covenant, but in fact it had been carefully framed so as to be consistent with the obligations of the Covenant. In any case Hitler's objection was a curious illustration of the fact that 'the devil can quote scripture for his purpose'.]

21 Other international obligations continue to be valid, for example the American 'Monroe Doctrine', specifically mentioned in this clause of the Covenant. [This clause was inserted to satisfy America. The Monroe Doctrine roughly means 'U.S.A. will not herself intervene in Europe, and will not allow Europe to intervene in the American continent'. It is hard to see how this 'Doctrine' could be consistent with the obligations of the Covenant.]

22 Provisions for the disposal of the former colonies of Germany and the provinces detached from the Turkish empire. They are to be allotted to various states under 'mandates' making the state concerned responsible for the good government of the territory in question to a special Mandates Commission of the League.

23 Other duties to be undertaken by the League. These include the improvement of industrial conditions, supervision of international trade in materials of war, extirpation of the 'white slave' traffic and the traffic in opium and other dangerous drugs.

24 All international organizations already existing are to be placed under the direction of the League.



25. Members of the League undertake to support the Red Cross organizations for the mitigation of disease throughout the world.

26. The Covenant can be amended by a unanimous vote of the Council together with a majority vote of the Assembly.

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